

Living a Worthy Life 3
Talent on Loan from God.
February 21 2010
Ephesians 4:7-13

As we've examined Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus we seen how he stresses the organic unity of the Church. The work of the triune God unites different people into one body. What results is an invisible unity, a unity which we may not always like, but a unity none the less. The body of Christ, although diverse due to differing cultures, differing expressions, differing theology, and different talents is nevertheless one. How we will experience this unity is the at the core of our passage this morning. Though united by the triune God, we, who are many, are not only one by God's grace in salvation, we will ultimately realize this unity as God brings us to full maturity. How does He do this? By giving gracious gifts to His church. By stretching us as we do the work of kingdom. We are united by God's grace.

But on with the Games! Every one stand-how many of you, have been glued to the Winter Olympics? Today's trivia quiz is on Olympic Talents

Olympic Talents

T or F **Olympic skiers subject** their bodies to as much as 3.5 g's—more than space shuttle astronauts endure during launch

When a Olympic Hockey player blasts a slap shot 30 feet from the net with 125 pounds of force, the goalie has less than _____ to react to the flying 3-inch-wide, 1-inch-thick puck.

- A. 1 Second
- B. 2 Seconds
- C. 300 Milliseconds
- D. 200 Milliseconds

Competing in the Biathlon requires both endurance and world-class shooting skills.

Athletes must ski 20 kilometers with a rifle and stop four times to shoot at targets, alternating prone and standing positions. The .22-caliber rifles have no optical sights,

and missing a target can mean skiing a 150-meter penalty loop. Former U.S. team member Shaun Marshall-Pryde once compared the event to “climbing 25 flights of stairs and then threading a needle five times without missing the hole.” Success requires tremendous conditioning:

Within seconds of skiing to the target, athletes must bring their heart rate down by about _____ beats per minute in order to shoot with a steady hand.

- 5
- 10
- 20
- 25

Figure Skaters tweak tight landings by flexing hips and knees and sinking their center of mass—thereby earning a few hundredths of a second of hang time and an extra 10 to 20 degrees of rotation—before landing with a force of up to _____ times a skater’s weight.

- 12
- 7
- 10
- 15

Olympic Ski Jumpers Launch off the jump at _____ M.P.H to Jump in excess of _____

- 50 -450 Feet
- 60-450 Feet
- 70-500 Feet
- 45-400 Feet

For the Olympians to accomplish any of the above truly takes talent on loan from God. But having talent on loan from God does not guarantee a gold medal. Shen Xue and Zhao Hongbo gave China their first ever Olympic figure skating title when they won gold in the pairs event in Vancouver on Monday. And these two definitely have talent on

loan from God. One figure skater says she: eats up to 3,500 calories a day to support a schedule of up to four hours of on-ice workouts and two more hours of cardio, strength training and stretching in the gym five days a week. She works out a sixth day on a more relaxed pace. Now this couple from China, kept up this pace for 18 Years before they won the Gold!

It is a reminder that God is a God of Grace who is for us! He provides the talent we need to accomplish the mission. He will give us what we need, so we must give up our own self-help programs. But we are foolish if we think because God gives us talent, that he will do it for us!

Christians have to be people who can do kingdom work, by finding out all we can about God's grace and then practice walking in his grace. It's like this –God's grace has given us Olympic size talent-but it is up to us to train ourselves to walk in His grace!

Remember James 2:26: ***As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.***

God's grace gives Talents 7-10

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it^[a] says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."^[b] ⁹(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions^[c]? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) Ephesians 4:7-10

Paul begins moving from the repetitious "one", from unity, to diversity as he says: "but to each one of us..." Grace not only unites all God's elect people as one; grace then is given to each one individually. Too often "grace" is nothing more than a by-word for salvation. It is too easy for us to think no further than just grace as the means by which I am made new, obtain heaven, am accepted by God. But while all that may be true, it never goes far enough.

This much fuller understanding of grace was hinted at in **2:8-10**. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. The grace which saves us from an eternal death, the grace which is a gift from God, which is received by faith, is a grace that also makes us God's workmanship. The God who molds us as trophies of grace, also forms us to live in light of that grace, to do good works. If, for you, being a Christian is only about heaven, you've missed what eternal life is all about. This is grace for living today. There is grace that is given now.

By way of emphasis Paul makes it clear that grace is given to each and every one of us. If we are His, if the Father has chosen us, the Son died to redeem us, the Spirit seals us, then there is grace poured out on you.

Notice the extent of that grace – "it is given as Christ apportioned it." This is better translated as "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." In proportion to Christ's gift, God measures out the grace we need. We have all seen super talented athlete who fizzled out, simply because they did not use their God given gifts. This scripture says God has give us spiritual gifts equal to the task, but it will be up to us to train to put these gifts to their maxim use.

What is the extent of God's grace to you in Christ? How far did God go in making you His own? The extent of the Cross, to the point of death, that is how far God goes in equipping you to live today. You are not only forgiven of sin, clothed with Christ's righteousness, but also are equipped to honor Him with your life today. But as it is always with grace, the rule used to determine how much grace you will receive is not your own merit, nor your promise for a bright future, not even how much you ask, but on the basis of Christ and Christ alone. He is the measuring rod, the ruler for our grace. In order to explain how this grace flows from the Father, through the Son to us, Paul quotes from **Psalms 68:18**. As is often the case when we read a citation from the Old

Testament we scratch our heads and wonder why this passage was used.

Psalm 68 is a picture of God's triumph over His enemies through the conquest of Egypt up to David's success in bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. But those events are just a faint picture of the greater victory achieved by God through Christ. The picture here is that of a triumphal entry by a conquering King. The vanquished are lead in tow; the spoils of war are divided. But what should stand out is the reversal which takes place. Paul, either emending the Psalm or quoting from another version, says: "he gave gifts to men" instead of "received gifts from men." This is a powerful picture of how merciful our God is. What is expected is that those conquered foes would be sold as slaves, would be killed in sport or religious sacrifice, are the spoils of war. But this conqueror gifts the conquered. In fact what Paul is alluding to is that now that our sins and will have been conquered in Jesus, Instead of beating us up or having us start at the bottom, Jesus gives us spiritual gifts, makes us God's son or daughter and entrusts the health of His kingdom to us.

Paul then goes on to explain what this passage means. With a firm Cross-centered view of history, Paul unfolds the meaning of the ascent and descent. This is one of those notorious passages of Scripture that we make a can of worms when we refuse to let the text speak for itself.

Through Church history, many have over-analyzed the descent into the lowly earthly regions as Christ's descent into Hell. This is the verse often cited as the support for the Apostles' Creed when we confess that Christ descended into Hell along with the obscure passage of **1 Peter 3:19** about Christ preaching to the spirits in prison who disobeyed at the time of the flood. Such an understanding has more in line with Greek mythology than Scripture. What we profess in the Creed is not Christ's physical descent into hell itself, but His suffering the torments of hell while on the Cross which were completed before He died and pronounced that it was finished while still on the Cross. What Paul is saying here is what he said in **Philippians 2:6ff** when he described the

humiliation of Christ in the Incarnation. In order for God to pour out His grace on us in the form of gifts given to each one of us, first victory had to be assured. Before a triumphal entry into heaven, there first must be a conquest of the enemy. That conquest is the humiliation of Christ in His taking on human form, in suffering the agony and torment of temptation, of the pain of the Cross. Before He ascended to the right hand of the Father, He first descended to take on our sin.

What does this mean for you and me?

First, God's grace to us flows from Christ's sacrifice for us. The context of grace is the Cross. If you are in Christ, then you have already received grace; it has been given because Christ's victory is already assured. Now that you are so gifted by God, remember how it was you were given so much. The humiliation of Christ in the Incarnation means that you and I serve in humility, too.

What Paul is showing us is that even in our Lord's life and ministry the way "up" was "down." Christ descended in order to ascend. So, too, as our Lord taught His disciples, the way to greatness is through service. If we are to employ spiritual gifts in a way that is consistent with the way our Lord obtained them for us we must humble ourselves as He humbled Himself.

The good news here is that Cornerstone has not been orphaned by her Founder to try as we might to grow and mature. We don't have to resort to techniques of self help, and adopting an inflated view of ourselves to make it through tough times. Rather, God's grace is present already to make us what we are to be.

Second, serving is what it means to belong to the body of Christ.

As grace has been given to each one and that grace came about through the work of Christ's death, burial, resurrection and ascension, serving is not an option. To refuse to serve, to reject the gracious talent, is to refuse to belong. When in the human body one portion rejects its role, when the foot refuses to walk, when the hand goes limp, when gangrene sets in, amputation is often the only course to take. Service is not an option.

What is more, as Christ has so equipped each of us to serve the body of Christ, we must conclude that not one of us is so equipped that we, without the assistance of others, can not supply what we need. There is a symbiotic necessity to the Church. We can not function without each other. God has gifted each of us, but none of us are so gifted as to not need the other. We each are given a piece of the jigsaw puzzle. It is not complete until each piece is in its place.

As I look at our church, I am pleased that we have the emphasis on grace that we have emphasized. But grace, when properly taught, will lead to service, will produce action. I see this becoming a reality when we have team Sunday here as people roll up their sleeves and serve. I saw this in the 500 finger sandwiches our servants made for the Michael Funeral. But I am not sure we will ever finish in this life time with God's goal, and that is every one of his children in some type of service for Jesus.

We have numerous people teaching, caring for each other's children, reaching out. There are those who are encouragers, who know how to show mercy. This must continue and grow. God's grace has hands and feet. If you are not plugged into some form of serving others, today make it happen.

God's grace gives different gifts

Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service,

While we've received gifts by God's grace, we all don't get the same thing.

God's gifts vary among them. While God's ultimate goal is unity, He achieves that not by forcing us into the same mold, but by showering us with a variety of gifts. The list in verse 11 focuses on some specific gifts. Other lists can be found in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4. These gifts can be set into three categories.

Foundation Talents

Apostles: As we talked last week the word means "sent one" the use of this in the New

Testament specifies one who was immediately appointed by Christ, who witnessed Him after the Resurrection and was rendered infallible by the gift of inspiration. This is a person of unique authority, who governed the early Church, by nature of Christ's direct commission.

Prophets: This gift was to speak with God's authority, communicating the Word of God to the Church that didn't have the post-resurrection canon. The prophets of the New Testament appear to be subordinate in authority to the Apostles, in that their inspiration was occasional. The nature of their office is fully taught in **1 Corinthians 14:1–40**. On occasion they might foretell the future, as in **Acts 11:28** and **21:9,11**, but like the Old Testament prophets their great work was to 'forth-tell' the word of God. This might be in bringing to light with convicting power people's sins or in bringing new strength to the Church by the word of exhortation.

Where are the apostles and prophets today? Here in the foundation laid for us: God's Word.

Paul previously described the work of the apostles and prophets in **2:20** as the ones who laid the foundation for the Church. We understand such gifts and offices to have ceased since the foundation is already established. We don't pour concrete footers after the framing is in place when building a house, nor do we set aside the important work of the apostles and prophets today.

Birthing Talent

Evangelist: With the foundation laid, now we come to those who build on that foundation. The term *evangelist* is unfortunately tainted by the prefix "tele-" but this gift was given so that new churches would begin, so people who do not know Christ would hear the Gospel, and by God's grace, respond in faith. Evangelists have the gift of sharing Jesus with others. They serve the body of Christ by drawing those outside the Church into the body. We are not given a lot of details about this gift beyond this passage. We are told that Philip, in Acts 21, was an evangelist and whose four

daughters were prophets. Paul tells Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:5** to do the work of an evangelist. An evangelist ensures the quantity of new disciples is large.

Maturing Talent

Pastor-teacher: If the evangelist is the obstetrician, then the pastor is the pediatrician.

This is perhaps the most familiar title to us today, but unfortunately it is not well understood. Paul's listing of these specific gifts should be read as four, not five gifts.

Pastor and teacher should be joined as a dual description of the same gift.

The grammar joins them as each gift is introduced by an article followed by its noun, but here the article precedes that of pastor which is then joined to the next word without the article by a conjunction. In Greek, this joins the two words into a hyphenated term. This gift is that of a teaching shepherd. Indeed it would be hard to see one without the other.

The duties of the pastor or Elder (which literally means 'shepherd') are to feed the flock with spiritual food and to see that they are protected from spiritual danger. Our Lord used the word in **John 10:11** to describe His own work, and He continues to be the chief pastor (**Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4**) under whom others are called to 'tend the flock of God.'

The title *pastor* is used in conjunction with elder and overseer or bishop. In the passage I just read in 1 Peter 5, the elders are told to be shepherds of God's flock. Paul told the elders in Ephesus this same thing when he saw them for the last time. In **Acts 20:28**, the elders are called pastors and bishops, that is, shepherds and overseers. This tender, caring, nurturing title suggests a touch here, a kind word there, a gentle prod at the right time. Yet it also suggests resolute strength and protection of the flock. A pastor/teacher is to make feeding the sheep a top priority, as Christ three times charged Peter to do (**John 21:15-17**).

In fact the Elders and the nominating committee when consider someone is to be an elder of the church-asks the question is their a small group –Sunday school where they are already feeding God's sheep? Future Elders in our church need to be protecting

and teaching a group of God's people-before they are recognized. This gift ensures quality disciples, who look more and more like Jesus!

God's grace gives different talents toward one goal Ephesians 4:11-13

so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Why does God give this variety of talents to the Church? What is the goal? The immediate goal is given in verse 12. The goal of God's gracious gifts is so that God's people will be prepared.

Just as we saw in verses 7-10, God's gifts are given with a view toward serving others and not an end in themselves. These specific gifts mentioned are to prepare others. It is from this word "prepare" that we get the English word "artist," someone who works with his hands creating something. This word is used in Matthew 4 of James and John who were mending their nets. Elsewhere in Greek, it was used of setting broken bones, of reconciling shattered relationships. The word means to help make functional, to get something ready for service. The job of pastor-teacher is essentially that of mending the saints, getting them ready. Helping them serve Jesus in doing the work of his kingdom. How does this preparation take place?

The list in verse 11 is not exhaustive, but answers the question of how unity among a diverse people is realized. There are other, very important gifts, but the focus here is that of teaching. The means by which the people of God are prepared, how believers are mended and set to work is through the evangelist, the pastor-teacher applying the truths laid down by the apostles and prophets.

That is not the end, though. Preparation must produce. Yet here the Church has often derailed. A distorted view of God's gifts has poisoned what the Church is all about. For some time the Church read these verses with a comma in verse 12 which made a list for what the pastor was to do. It mistakenly read that that pastor-teacher was to prepare

God's people and also do the work of service.

The effect of this simple grammatical mistake was to view that ministry, that is, serving, was left up to professionals while everyone else came as spectators who listened and left. The pastor was to teach, encourage, maintain the focus on Christ as well as making sure everyone's needs, both physical and spiritual, were being met. Christianity became a spectator sport, like football - eleven men down on the field, desperately in need of rest, and 50,000 people up in the stands desperately in need of exercise.

But as the NIV correctly translates this verse, the pastor is to prepare God's people so that God's people do the works of service. The service here can also be translated with that very professional sounding word, "ministry." The ministry of the Church is accomplished by the prepared people of God. This is Paul's point about Psalms 68, we who have been conquered by Christ's love and grace are now equipped to go and share that love with acts of kindness.

This is a watershed text for the doctrine of the Church. It effectively eliminates the traditional model of the local church as a "pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority." It also shoots down the model of a "bus, in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are the passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him." (Stott, God's New Society, pg 166-167) Instead it is a picture of a body or a family each part doing making its contribution, so we all grow up to become mature in Christ!

Conclusion: When Lindsey Vonn was 9 years old, she met Olympic downhill silver medalist Picabo Street at a Minnesota ski shop and decided she wanted to be just like her someday. Vonn turned out even better, and the Vail resident proved it Wednesday, becoming the first American woman to win an Olympic downhill. And Vonn did it despite a painful injury to her right shin that made her wonder in recent days if she could race.

Vonn left Minnesota for Vail when she was 12 because she wanted to become a

downhill and Minnesota didn't have the mountains for it. Virtually everything she has done since was focused on what she achieved Wednesday: becoming Olympic downhill champion. I've worked my whole life for this," Vonn said. "I'm even more thankful to win, considering all the troubles that I've had. It makes it very sweet to have this victory."

You too have a life-you too have Olympic size talent on loan from God. The Bible says that God's reward for you in heaven will be based upon your faithfulness here on earth. If you're faithful in little things, the Bible says, you'll be faithful in many in heaven. The Bible tells us that this life is a test. You're being tested on your faithfulness. At the end of Jesus' ministry on earth this is what Jesus said in John 17:4 *"I brought You glory on earth [how?] by completing the work You gave Me to do."* This is a very important point, friends. How do you bring glory to God? Because that's the number one goal in life – to bring glory to God? How do we bring glory to God? By completing the work He gives each of us to do. By winning a gold medal of life.

The third thing is one day God's going to make an audit of your, life. One day you're going to stand before God and He's going to ask you two questions. If you've missed everything else in the message I want you to get this. One day God's going to ask you these two questions.

First, What did you do with My Son, Jesus Christ? He's not going to say, What religion were you? What denomination were you? Where did you go to church? Where did you get baptized? He's going to say, What did you do with My Son Jesus? If you've never known the answer to that the answer is you need to receive His grace. You need to accept His forgiveness. Your past can be forgiven, you get a purpose for living, talent on loan from God and a home in heaven. I hope you'll do that today if you haven't done so.

Then He's going to ask you the second question. The first one is about salvation. The second one is about stewardship. It's this question: What did you do with what I gave you – your talent, your abilities, your time, your money, your resources, your relationship, your networks, your opportunities. What did you do with what you were given? Did you bury it-or did you use those talents to win a medal that never fades- eternal glory for Jesus? Praise band come up front.

I want you to be prepared for those two questions. By giving your life to Christ and becoming a servant of Jesus Christ-If you have not given your life to Christ do so by coming up front as we stand to sing.

Second, if you need a church family to help exercise your faith and to put to use your Olympic size spiritual gift and God is calling you to this church family come up front as we stand to sing.