

We are in a season where we believe that the Lord would have us study the theme "Finding your gift". Phillip has shared some aspects of the gifts that the Lord gives to us, and will be continuing on this theme for the next few weeks. Today I plan to put the purpose of the Lord's gifts to us into some sort of perspective - what are the gifts for? What do we do with them? How do we use them, and to what end? Why do we want to find out what our gifts are? What motivates us to do this?

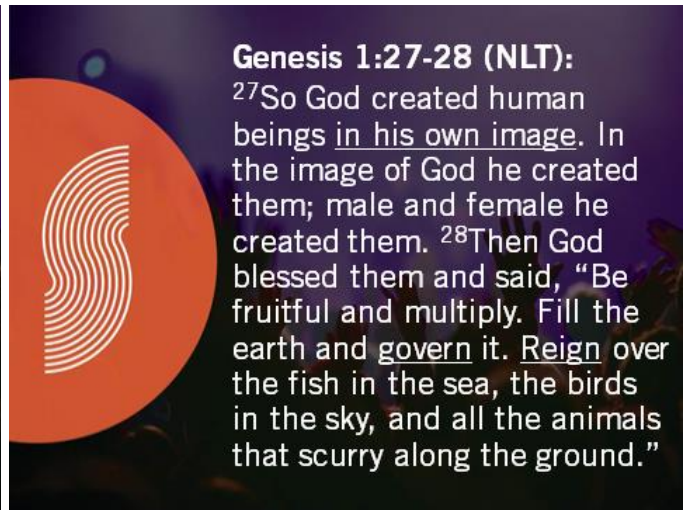
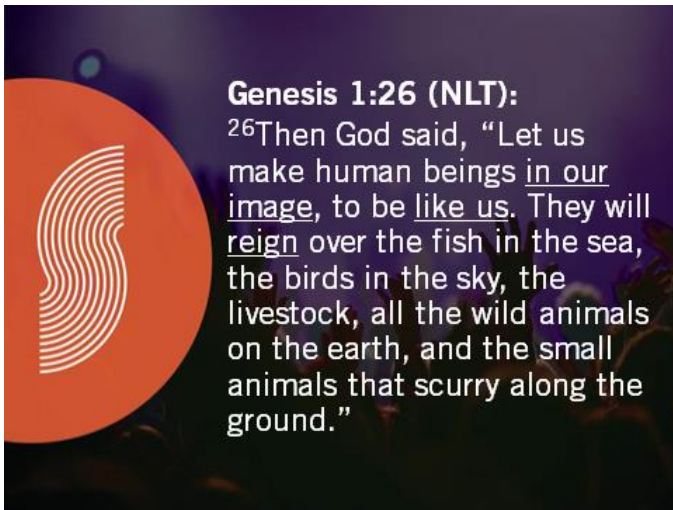
How often have you and I complained about a situation or situations? Often, the Lord draws our attention to the plight of someone - or even that of a nation - and expects us to engage with Him about it. This explains why different people feel strongly about different issues. But do we actually DO anything about what we are complaining about? Our first course of action should be to speak to the Lord about it - then, if He inspires us to act in any way, to do so faithfully as He leads us.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to lead the rest of society in every area. If I complain about the government of my country, and I have not prayed for the government, my complaint does not achieve anything positive - it is a dangerous activity that may perhaps fall into the category of gossip - and we all know how the Lord feels about that! If I complain about the government, but do not vote at every election, I had better zip it. If I complain about the government, but do not pay all tax that is due by me, I am contributing to the problem - and have no standing as a critic.

If I complain of a lack of morals in society, but do not teach my own children the Scriptural standard of life, I am just making a noise.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the only effective instrument to bring change to the world within which we live. We have seen repeated examples throughout the Scriptural record of how a handful of people (sometimes only one) have changed the course of nations and the world. The thread that runs through the effectiveness of these people is a simple one - hearing and obeying the Lord. Examples could be Jonah, Elijah, Daniel, Hezekiah, John the Baptist and the Apostles. Of course, the ultimate example is Jesus.

Now let's look at what Scripture has to say about our role and responsibility on the earth.



We see from this passage of Scripture that we are to reign, or govern, the earth and everything on it. But it is very important to note that the context of the delegated task is that of our having been created in the image of God - so we need to reign and govern as He would. And that is why we need one another's gifts - we cannot do it alone.

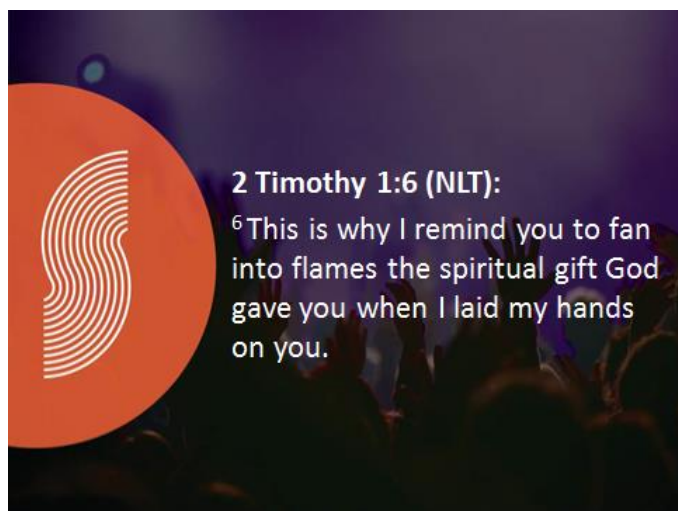
It is important for us to realise that we have been given this responsibility - if we shirk it or do it without the Lord's leading and anointing, we do not fulfil His call on our lives - as individuals or as the Church.



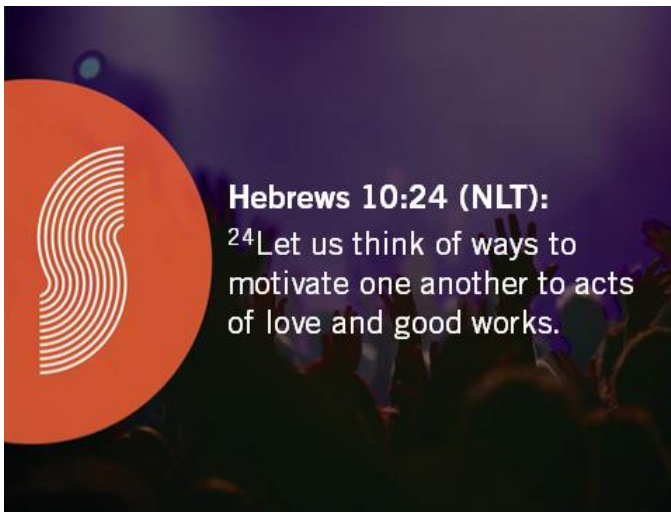
Every one of us has been gifted by the Lord so that we can effectively fulfil our calling to reign and govern - but do we? A carpenter needs tools to perform his task of creating a useful item from a piece of timber - it is the same for us - we need tools (gifts) to be effective in our task of reigning and governing on the earth. The Carpenter's tool is effective **ONLY** when it is in the Carpenter's hand - in other words, when it is in use. The same holds for our gifts - they achieve nothing unless we employ them under the direction and leading of their Giver - the Lord.



Another aspect pertaining to the Carpenter's tools is that they need to be looked after - they need to be kept clean and oiled, and sharpened when they become dull (or blunt). The same could be said of our gifts - we need to look after them and keep them oiled (with the oil of the Holy Spirit) and sharp (through prayer as we listen for the accurate word that initiates the use of the gift).



See the Church at work here: Paul laid his hands onto Timothy to impart the gift to him. So he heard from the Lord and acted. The Church and the world benefitted from the gift in Timothy. And the Church had a responsibility to support and exhort Timothy as he exercised his gift.



Every craftsman has to learn how to use the tools of his trade - and it is the same for us - we receive the gifts, but we need instruction in their use. Many of the lessons and trials in our lives are directed at this. We should also submit to instruction from the Scriptures and to the process of being disciplined - all of this helps us to make the best and most effective use of our God-given gifts.

We need one another in this process! We truly are gifts one to the other...

The result of good sharp tools used with skill by the experienced Carpenter could be something like this:



A beautifully crafted boat that does what it is designed to do - and it looks good too!

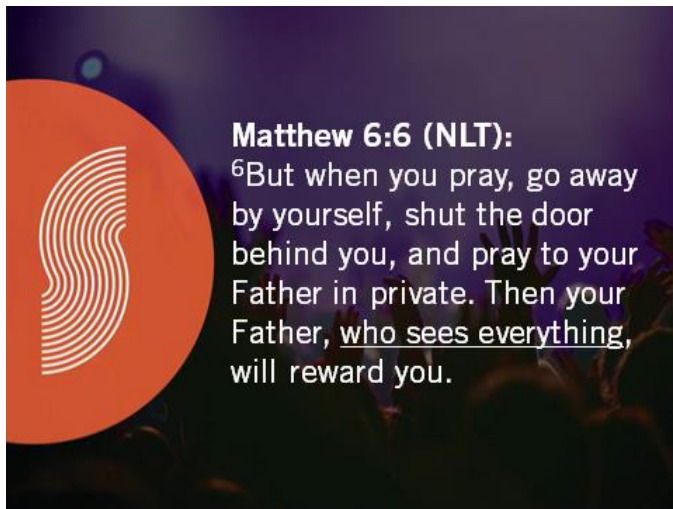
This concept also goes to our use of the Scriptures and to what we actually hear from the Lord (whether it be Scripture that has been illuminated by the Holy Spirit, a prophetic word, or the Lord speaking to us as we pray) - see James 1:22:



We need to DO what we are instructed to do in the Scriptures. So although we receive gifts, we need to decide to use them under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

What is the finest and most valuable gift that any person may be given? Is it not what we call salvation? To be born again into the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ? Is it not to become a Disciple of Jesus Christ? What role do you and I play in the process of people coming to the realisation that there is such a gift, and then embracing it?

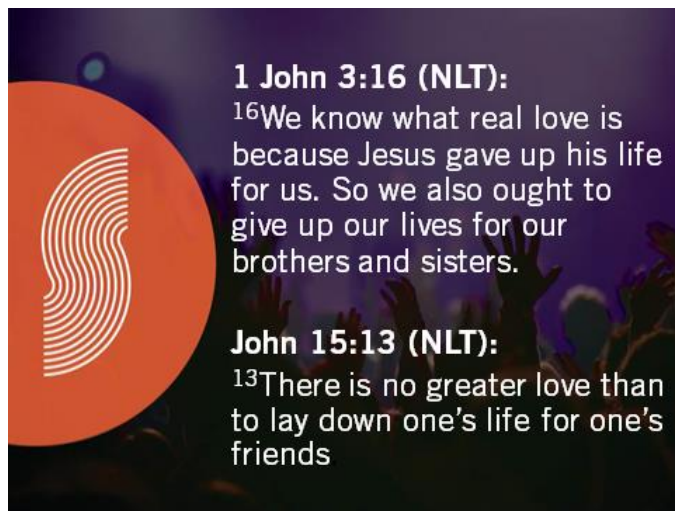
The very first - indeed foundational - step is prayer. People seem often to look down at prayer and intercession - it is very often an "invisible" ministry (act of serving, or love). But remember what the Lord said about it:



I think that one of the truest manifestations of love must be one who prays for other people (intercession). It is not done for human recognition or glory - it is done to engage with the Lord in His service.

Only after we have prayed, can we truly effectively exercise our gifts to serve, reign and govern.

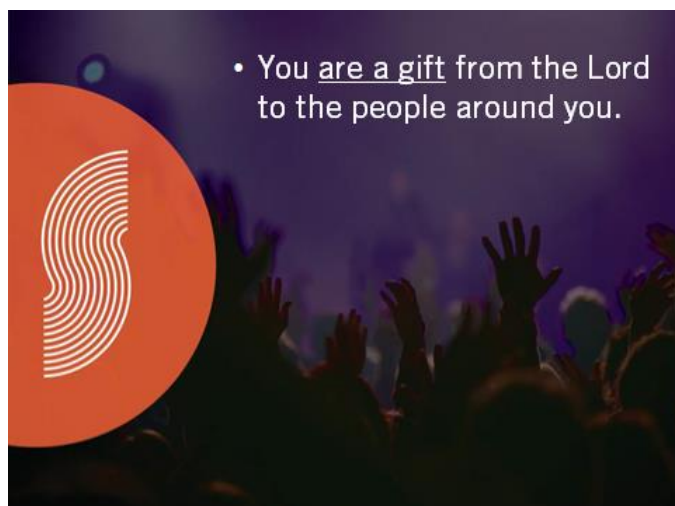
See what the Scriptures say about love:



We see here that using our gifts effectively can only be done when our attitude is one of love.



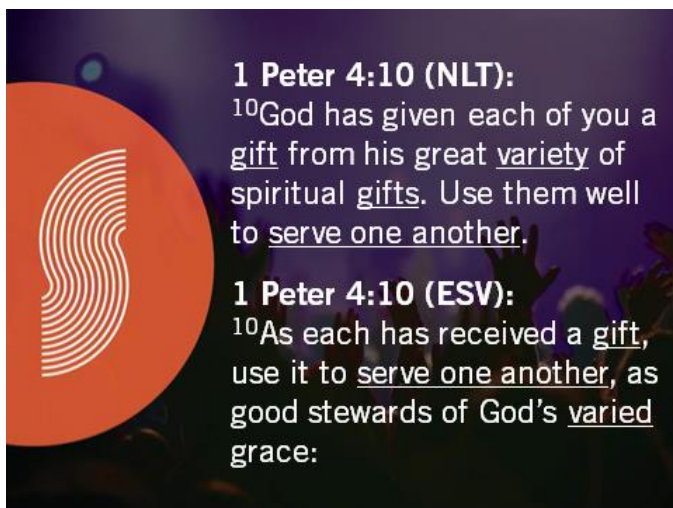
Now as a practical tool on how to make a difference to the world that we live in, here is a summary - we'll look at each point briefly...



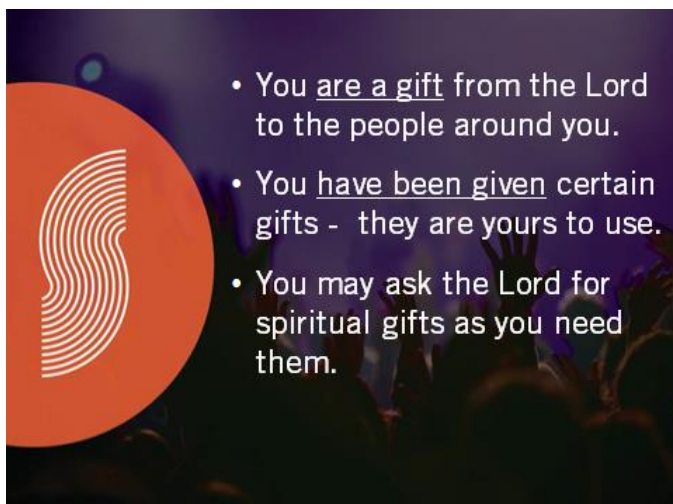
Turn to the person next to you and say "You are a gift to me". Now say "I am a gift to you". Does anyone believe that? We have already covered this point this morning - remember the Genesis Scripture? We have been created to reign and to govern on the earth...



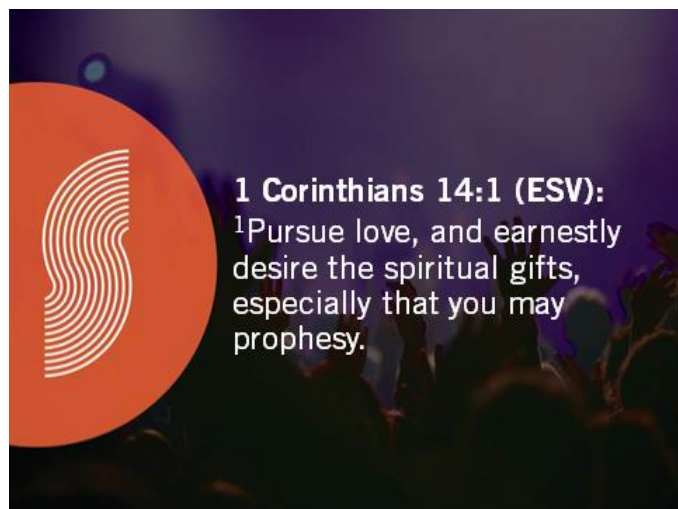
As we have learned from what Phillip has said, and will hear more about in the next few weeks, we have been given certain gifts. See what the Apostle Peter has to say:



God HAS given a variety of spiritual gifts - everyone has received gifts - their purpose? **To serve one another.** Is that not manifest love?



We sometimes find ourselves in a situation where we need one of the spiritual gifts - perhaps a word of knowledge as we are praying for healing for someone - at that point we should ask the Lord for the gift that we need - He loves us and the person for whom we are praying enough to give us what is needed.



Does love motivate me? As I desire the spiritual gifts? Love being that which causes me to choose to consider the needs of someone else to be more important than my own? Do I really care about that which the Lord cares about?



Scripturally, there is no such thing as "human rights" - but there is love, which considers others needs before your own.

So why am I talking about "You are a gift"? I think that it is because we are given the privilege of making a difference to the lives of the people around us - and even far afield - as we use the gifts that the Lord has given to us.

A practical example of this is the Kings Children's Home in the Eastern Cape. I have purposely chosen this example because we know it, but also because it is far enough away not to involve anyone here. Recently, the 50th abandoned child was taken in by them. Now we might think that 50 out of the thousands of abandoned children is not significant - but for each of those 50 - IT IS!

How was slavery abolished in Great Britain? It was because of one man, William Wilberforce, who answered the Lord's call to activism against it. He succeeded because he acted - the Lord then added people to help him in his calling, he led a team of activists who worked tirelessly to promote the abolition of the slave trade. His life's work did not end with the abolition of the slave trade, he pressed on and was responsible for much social reform in Great Britain.

This theme is very relevant to us as we approach the national and provincial election that takes place here on Wednesday. I have read and heard many opinions on the effectiveness or otherwise of exercising our vote - I want to present what may be a slightly different perspective on this that goes to our theme today - you are a gift.

Imagine, if you will, a world where everyone actually did the right thing. Imagine the cumulative effect of many people, led by the Lord as the Holy Spirit inspires them, acting on that conviction, instead of allowing themselves to be bullied or threatened out of acting, or into acting contrary to that conviction. Imagine a world where each of us is motivated by true Christian love - would there be hate? Murder? Adultery? Theft? Need? Poverty? ... Lust?

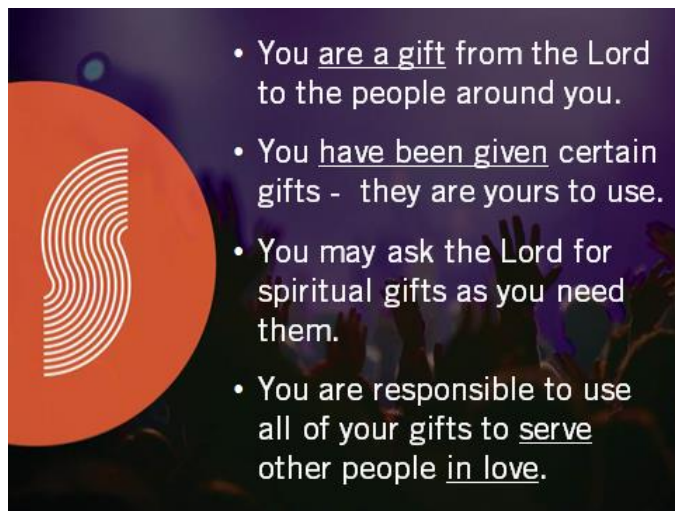
Do you think that this is impossible? That it cannot happen? Think again! We know that ONE man, the Lord Jesus Christ, changed the course of human history. What was His secret? Well, I submit that it was in the fact that He did only what He saw His Father doing - in other words, He gave Himself to His Father's will. God is love, and manifests His love to humanity.



Your vote is a gift - it is God-given, but it is also your gift to the people of this country. Use it with discernment and love...

We need to trust the Lord enough so that we do the right thing, no matter what, and to leave the result up to Him.

In conclusion - let's sum up:



We are gifts of God, by God, for God's glory and pleasure. You are one of a kind, uniquely crafted by the Lord for NOW.

Pray:

- I am a gift from You Lord, to the people around me.
 - Thank You Lord for the gifts that you have placed into me.
 - Thank You Lord for the gifts that you have placed into the people around me.
 - I do want to be instrumental in making a difference - please guide me and help me to follow Your leading in this as I reign and govern on the earth.
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