

## **The Sovereign Source of a Successful Ministry**

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

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When Alexander the Great conquered much of the then known world in the fourth century B.C., he gave the Greek people access to some of the great civilizations of the ancient world, the civilizations of the Egyptians, of the Persians, of the Babylonians, and so Greek travel began, and they began to spread all over the world that he had conquered to see some of the ancient landmarks, and they began to make a list of the sites that absolutely must be seen. Later, those must-see sites around the Mediterranean rim became known as the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The most famous of these sightseeing lists from that period of time were those compiled in the first and second centuries B.C. by Antipater of Sidon and Philon of Byzantium.

One of those original seven wonders of the ancient world that was on that must-see list in the centuries leading up to Christ, only one of them, the oldest of them, survives to this day. It is the Great Pyramid of Giza. Most Egyptologists believe that this pyramid was built as a tomb for the fourth century Pharaoh Khufu. It took approximately 20 years to build they tell us, concluding around the year 2560 B.C. It stands, or stood at the time, some of the outer surface stones have now gone away, but at the time it was completed they believe it stood 481 feet tall. In modern terms that's the equivalent of a 48 story building. Just think about this, for almost 4,000 years of the world's history it was the tallest structure on the planet.

Experts still aren't sure how it was built. There are various theories, that the massive blocks were either dragged into place, are lifted into place, or rolled into place, they really don't know, but to build it in 20 years, which they're fairly certain of, would require installing about 800 tons of stone every day for 20 years. Or let me look at it another way, it would require moving more than 12 massive blocks into place each hour, day and night, for 20 years. What we see today, what you see in this photo, is substructure. That was like the two by fours, if you would, the outer stones were smooth and put up and down its entire surface. Those have been removed in the intervening years, but those finish stones, some of which still survive to this day, were fit together with such high precision that the mean gap between the stones averages one fiftieth of an inch.

Recent excavations at nearby camps for the workers suggest that it was built by tens of thousands of skilled workers. In fact, one expert on Giza estimates that there were 200,000 skilled workers working there every day for 20 years. As I read about this great pyramid, the greatest building project on earth for over 3,800 years, I thought about those tens of thousands, perhaps 200,000, men who were responsible for it. Think about that, each of them had a specific skill, no one of them could accomplish the task alone, and they were completely under the control of another.

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The Pharaoh determined where, how, and with what results, their gifts would be used. We don't serve a human pharaoh, but a holy Lord, still as you think about ministry, as we all think about the ministries God has called us to, our situation is much the same as theirs. We have each been given a specific skill, we are involved in a task that we cannot accomplish alone, and we are completely under the control of another who determines how, where, and with what results, we will serve Him. Nowhere is that truth taught more clearly in all of Scripture than in the passage we come to tonight in 1 Corinthians 12.

Paul founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey and he ministered there for more than 18 months. Several years later, toward the end of his third missionary journey, while he was ministering in Ephesus, he writes the letter back to them that we call 1 Corinthians. He writes to tell them of his plan to spend the winter there, as well as to address a variety of issues that had arisen. In chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians he addresses various issues related to corporate worship, the role of women in corporate worship, the correction of abuses in the love feast and the Lord's Table. Then he comes to chapters 12 through 14. These chapters are about spiritual gifts. The Corinthians had apparently asked some questions about this issue, problems had come to Paul's knowledge about them there in Corinth, and so he addresses it.

He begins in chapter 12 with general instruction about spiritual gifts; he lays a foundation if you will, for them. In chapter 13 he tells them that love is primary, even over the spiritual gifts, and they all have to be exercised with a heart of love and concern for others. In chapter 14, he comes to a specific response to the misuse of tongues in Corinth. Tonight we want to center on chapter 12 and the foundational instruction about spiritual gifts. He opens the chapter, if you look at verses 1 to 3 you'll see, he opens the chapter with a primary concern to help them distinguish what belongs to the spirit and what doesn't.

Apparently, some of the Corinthians were involved in some sort of ecstasies that were controlled by demons, ecstasies that were controlled by demons, and amazingly they claimed to be teaching by the control the Spirit what was blasphemous of Jesus Christ. You see in verse 3, "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is anathema,'" or damned, "and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,'" that is, with meaning, with their hearts, "except by the Holy Spirit." No one truly confesses Jesus as Lord, except by the work of the Spirit. So he's trying to set them straight. In verses 4 through 7 he argues for the need for diversity for gifts within the body. In verses 8 through 11 he has a brief list of spiritual gifts to illustrate this diversity, and then in the rest of the chapter he uses the human body as an illustration, the members of the human body, to illustrate the reality of, and the importance of, diversity of gifts within the body. Now with that background, this evening I want to concentrate on verses 4 through 7.

By God's providence, early in my ministry I was forced to study this text, and I can tell you that understanding the profound truths packed into these few verses absolutely revolutionized my

understanding and approach to ministry. Mark, it's my prayer that this passage will have the same impact on you, that it will be a passage that sustains you through good times and difficult times, that it will remind you of God's sovereignty in your ministry. Let me read it for us, 1 Corinthians 12:4. Here's the foundation that we need for understanding giftedness.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In these verses Paul begins addressing the problem on his heart, not by attacking the abuse of tongues, which he'll get to in chapter 14, but by laying a doctrinal foundation regarding spiritual gifts. This passage really articulates for us four foundational principles about our service. Whether you are going to be a missionary, a pastor, or you're simply going to serve as a member of the body of Christ in a local congregation like this one, this passage is for all of us, four foundational principles about our service in the church today.

The first foundational principle is this, God has chosen the character of your gift. God has chosen the character of your gift. Look at verse 4, "there are varieties of gifts." That Greek word varieties is used three times in the New Testament, all of them here in this passage. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and in secular Greek, it means a distribution, an apportionment. The context here, though, argues for the New American Standard's translation, "there are varieties," that is, there are various kinds, there is a diversity of gifts. In fact Peter, in 1 Peter 4, talking about spiritual gifts, says that they are manifold, that is, they are multicolored, there are many different gifts. Notice the word gifts, a variety of gifts, the Greek word is charismata, it literally means "a gift of grace." It indicates the origin of the gifts, they are from God as an expression of His grace, an expression of His unmerited favor. Specifically, the word refers to what we call spiritual gifts.

Now what is a spiritual gift? One author defines it like this, "It is an ability given to an individual supernaturally by God, through the Holy Spirit, so that the recipient may utilize that ability to minister to the needs of the church." That's a spiritual gift. It is an ability that God, through the Holy Spirit, gives to the believer in order to minister in the church. When you look at the scope of the New Testament there are, and this is really a different message for different time, but there are really two kinds, or types, of gifts. There are what we could call temporary sign gifts, 2 Corinthians 12:12 refers to the "signs of an apostle," including "signs, wonders and miracles." These would be gifts that are miraculous, like miracles, healings, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Their purpose was to authenticate the apostles and their message as the Word of God. That's why these gifts are called the "signs of an apostle."

Hebrews 2:3, in fact, look at Hebrews 2, the writer of Hebrews, writing shortly before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., because it's not mentioned in Hebrews, which if it had

already happened, he certainly would have mentioned, as he mentions the end of the whole system, so we know it was probably just before 70 A.D., listen to what he writes, he said, verse 3, “how shall we escape,” this is Hebrews 2:3, “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After this salvation was at first spoken through the Lord.” There was stage one, the Lord taught it. “It was confirmed to us by those who heard,” step two are, “those who heard,” that’s the apostles, and then it was confirmed to the writer of Hebrews and others by the apostles. So the Lord spoke the gospel to the apostles, who in turn spoke it to others, including the author of Hebrews. Now notice what he says in verse 4 about the apostles, “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

In other words, God confirmed the message of the apostles by giving them miraculous gifts. Those gifts were there to confirm, in their time, the message that they spoke. Both biblical history and church history show that these gifts ceased with the death of the apostles. In fact, as you read the New Testament chronologically, the mention of miraculous gifts begins to wane in the middle of church history, or New Testament history, and is gone in the second half of **of** the New Testament record, essentially there's no mention of those miraculous gifts, except in the past tense, as it is here in Hebrews. So there are those temporary sign gifts.

The second kind of gifts, the second category, are permanent edifying gifts, the gifts that are still around, that weren't there to confirm the apostles and their message, but rather are for the continual benefit of the church. I love Peter because he takes all of the gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament and he breaks them into two categories. In 1 Peter 4 he says there are teaching gifts and there are serving gifts. So when you look at the permanent edifying gifts you can break those down into those two categories, teaching gifts and serving gifts.

Obviously, Mark, God has gifted you with teaching gifts. That's His gift to you, but it's more than His gift to you, it's His gift to the church, our church, other churches in which you've served, and the ministry to which He has called you in the coming days. Now, Paul lists nine gifts. If you look back in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul lists nine gifts in verses 8 through 10. If you look at the places in the New Testament where there are a list of gifts, this place as well as in Romans 12, essentially you find there are a total of 18 spiritual gifts named. Four of the 18 are probably those temporary sign gifts because they're miraculous. Two gifts occur in both lists, both here in 1 Corinthians and in Romans 12, so that means, if you do the math, about 12 of the gifts mentioned in Scripture are permanent edifying gifts, but because the lists vary slightly, and they may not be exhaustive, these twelve permanent gifts that are mentioned may simply be intended to show us the potential diversity, they're not exhaustive, they're not exclusive, they're others, even beyond the ones that are mentioned.

Think of it this way, the twelve permanent gifts listed in the New Testament become a divine pallet, with which God can paint. Most Christians are a carefully blended mix of several gifts.

That's why some prefer to speak of a Christian's giftedness, rather than his gift, because gift implies one simple gift, whereas giftedness implies a blended variety of the spiritual gifts mixed together uniquely for each person.

You know, color is an amazing thing. Scientists tell us that the human eye, your eye, can distinguish about ten million different colors and tones. It's incredible, but all ten million of those colors and tones of colors come from, are you ready for this, three primary colors. If you've ever done any printing in the old days you understand this, red, blue and yellow, that's it, those are the three primary colors. If you've done any painting you understand that. All ten million of those colors and tones come from those three primary colors. Those three primary colors cannot be mixed from other colors. They can only be derived from the substances in which they are inherent. That's why they're called primary colors. They can't be mixed. God gave us three primary colors from which the full range of all those ten million colors and hues our eyes can distinguish, come.

Now think about that, if God can use three primary colors to produce ten million different colors and hues and tones, imagine the diversity of gifts when God has 12 primary gifts with which to mix. There's an infinite variety, just look around you in this church, and you'll see that variety. When it comes to our capacity to serve the Lord, no two of us are exactly alike. So, Paul says, "there are varieties of gifts." But notice what he says in verse 4, the second part, "but the same Spirit." Paul's point is the same Spirit is the source of all those gifts. He distributed various gifts, look down in verse 11, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." This is His sovereign choice. He determines what gift, what giftedness, what mix from that divine palette, you have. Amazing, the variety is not something God merely tolerates, but the Spirit of God has done it on purpose.

In fact, as Paul fleshes out his argument in these verses, he weaves into it the ultimate illustration of diversity within unity, and that is the person of God. Look at verse 4, you have the Spirit, verse 5, you have the Lord, meaning the second person of the Trinity, verse 6, you have God, meaning the Father. His point is the diversity of gifts and the church has its roots in God Himself. So God has determined, Mark, the gift, the giftedness that you have, and for each of us that's true, and you can do nothing to change that.

It's easy to think poorly about the giftedness we have, it's easy to measure our giftedness against others. You ever tempted to do that? Let me share a secret with you, pastors are tempted to do that, missionaries are tempted to do that, although we may be more subtle about it than the apostles were, who actually argued in Jesus's presence about who was the greatest, the basic tendency to compare ourselves is still in our hearts. If as you think soberly about your own giftedness, you conclude that you are especially gifted, and there are those who are, the reality that you had nothing to do with it should absolutely demolish every temptation to pride. This was the sovereign work of the Spirit. If you believe, on the other hand, that you are less gifted,

and you find yourself wishing that you had someone else's package of gifts, what we learn here, that God has sovereignly determined that, should erase any temptation to discontent.

Now don't misunderstand, when I say God has sovereignly determined your giftedness, that doesn't undermine human responsibility. The New Testament makes it very clear that there is great responsibility regarding spiritual gifts. For example, let me just give you a couple examples, the church is responsible to evaluate a person's giftedness, particularly when it comes to a man who's pursuing ministry; 1 Timothy 5:22, tells elders, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily," make sure he's called by God and gifted by God. So we have a responsibility to evaluate that.

It also doesn't obviate the need to work hard and show progress in the use of your gift; 1 Peter 4:10, Peter writes, "employ your gift in serving one another," and then he adds this, "as good stewards." It's a very interesting word steward, it's combined of two Greek words, one of them is house and the other is manager. You are a house manager of the giftedness God is given you. It refers, in New Testament terms, to the slave that was responsible for managing the property of his master, the household, actually distributing the wages and food to all the members of the household of a large family, a large household. It's a lot of responsibility, and Peter says, whatever gift you have, whatever giftedness you have, whether it's a serving gift or whether it's a teaching gift, you are to be a wise steward of it. You're like a house manager for God with that gift, use it wisely, and you're supposed to make progress in the use of it. Let me challenge you, Mark, especially as you leave and you go, it's so important that you don't rest in what you've already accomplished. Look at 1 Timothy 4, Paul urges Timothy with these words, 1 Timothy 4:14,

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, [*don't neglect it,*] which was bestowed on you [*in his case*] through prophetic utterance [*along with what we will do tonight*] the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; [*with your giftedness*] be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

It's so important that we make progress. So, divine sovereignty does not do away with human responsibility.

We should soberly evaluate how our gift fits into the body. Romans 12:3, Paul writes, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." Think soberly about the gift He's given you. There were two extremes in Corinth. The same extremes exist today. One of those extremes is to think of our giftedness as insignificant and unimportant compared to the gifts of others. You ever tempted to do that?

Well, I mean, Tom, you know, he's up there teaching, I don't do anything like that. This happened in Corinth, look at 1 Corinthians 12:15, he says, you know "the foot says, 'Well I don't get to be the hand, so I'm not part of the body,'" my gift is insignificant, I'm just the foot, oh I wish I could be the hand. "It is not for this reason, any the less a part of the body," and he gives several other illustrations as well. That is a very real temptation, to look at your giftedness and think of it as insignificant because it's not what someone else has; it's still an important member of the body, that's Paul's point.

The other extreme is to think that our giftedness is superior to others, and Paul gets to this down in verse 20 and following, "there are many members, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you,'" I'm the eye. I play the really important role here. We can think that our giftedness is superior to others. We can think it's superior in kind. In Corinth what gift did they think was really superior? Tongues. At a teaching church like this, or in ministries where we're into teaching the Word of God, it becomes very easy to think the teaching gifts are the really important ones and the serving gifts, well, you know, we don't really need them.

We can also think that our giftedness is superior in quality. We can measure ourselves against others who have the same gift and always come out on top. It's a special temptation for students and pastors. Now don't misunderstand me, there are clearly times when a teacher or preacher has so abused the Word of God that we should be critical of him for the truth's sake, but if it's obvious the guy has worked hard, if it's obvious he is trying to teach the genuine meaning of the text, we shouldn't allow a critical spirit into our hearts. It's one of the things I really appreciate about my mentor, John MacArthur. He can sit in a service where a young guy is preaching and be blessed by the Word of God. When I was in seminary I read an article by American theologian W.G.T. Shedd addressing this tendency to be critical of the similar giftedness of others, and particularly of those who teach and preach, and he made this observation, "The man who is truly hungry doesn't care what the platter looks like on which the food is served." If it's really food, if it's really the truth, the packaging doesn't matter so much.

Now before we leave this point, I want to answer the most common question about spiritual gifts that I get, and it's "How do I know?" "How can I know what my giftedness is?" Here's what I tell people. The most practical step you can take to discern your giftedness is just get involved in the life of the church, because what happens is we tend to gravitate toward the area of our gifts. I mean this happens with our physical body, right? So much of the functions of our bodies are involuntary, each part just functions. Your liver did not have to complete a three-page personality assessment to discover its gifts. God placed it in the body and it just ends up doing what God made it to do, and that's how it works in the church. You don't need to take a three page assessment, just get involved in the life of the church, and as you do, you will gravitate toward and be confirmed by the leadership of the church and the others around you that that's where your giftedness lies. Just get involved and you'll end up over time filling the role God designed for you. So, number one, God has sovereignly chosen the character of your gift.

There's a second foundational principle and it's God has decided the context of your service. Look at verse 5, "there are varieties," there's that same word again, various kinds, "of ministries." The Greek word translated ministries is a form of the word deacon. It means services. It refers to the kind of work in which our gifts are employed. It speaks of the context or the circumstances in which we use our gifts, the various ways one's giftedness can be used in the church. Two people who have very similar gifts can use their gifts in different kinds of avenues of ministry. For example, if your gift is teaching there are varieties of ministries in which that gift can be used, different age groups, maybe you teach children, maybe you teach youth, maybe teach adults; different venues, maybe your teaching gift is one-on-one and you do great sitting across the table from someone else, maybe it's as a Bible study leader in a home fellowship, maybe it's a Sunday school teacher, or eventually, if God wills, you're called and gifted and as a pastor, the leader of the corporate worship. If you're pastor there may even be different local churches God moves you to, and if you're a missionary, Mark, there may be different fields God moves you to. That's the idea. There are varieties of contexts in which we use the giftedness God has given us.

But notice verse 5, "but the same Lord." Lord here refers to the second person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who decides the ways and the places in which our spiritual gifts are used. He is the sovereign of the context of our service. In Ephesians 4:11 Paul tells us that spiritual gifts and gifted men are given to the church under Christ's authority for His purposes. I love that picture in Revelation 1, where Christ is holding the elders of the church in His hands. The Lord decides the context of your service, the work, the specific work in which your giftedness will be employed. Again, think about the physical body. Not only did God give certain capacities and skills to your physical eyes, for example, but he decided where in the body they would fit and exactly what kind of service they would render to the rest of the body. In the same way, Christ has given every person in the church a place of service.

Let me take it a step farther with pastors and missionaries. Christ will sovereignly place you and your family in the church and the field where He wants you to serve Him, and that's what He's doing. This is not ultimately your choice. This is His choice. He is the one who sovereignly determines the context of our service. It's not our place to question the Lord of the church. If it turns out to be a hard, difficult, even small place, that's okay. That's the Lord of the church's doing. If it's a prominent, easier place and the ministry thrives, that's of Christ as well. So don't allow yourself to be either discontent or proud. There's a comfort here because I can be certain that Christ has an assigned place of ministry for me, not just now, but in the future as well. God has chosen, the Spirit has chosen, the character of your gift. Christ has determined the context of your service.

The third foundational principle is found in verse 6, God has determined the results of your efforts. "There are varieties of effects." The Greek word effects occurs only two times in the New Testament, here in verse 6 and down in verse 10 where it's translated effecting. The



English concepts of energy, energetic, energize, come from this Greek work. It refers to the effects of God's powerful working. So in this verse Paul is talking about the results of your ministry, the outcome of your efforts. Notice he says, "There are varieties of outcomes," varieties of results, "but the same God." Paul's point here is, the Spirit not only decided the gifts you have, and the Lord will decide where and how you will use those gifts, but the Father will decide what the results will be.

It's not an excuse for halfhearted effort, we have to work as hard as we can, Paul certainly did. In Colossians 1:29, he says, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." First Timothy 4:10, "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we've fixed our hope on the living God." You and I, in whatever God has called us to, must expend the maximum effort in the use of our spiritual gift and in the context in which we use it, but in the end God determines the results. Isn't that what He says in 1 Corinthians 3? You remember, Paul's talking about the conflict, you know, people were lining up behind different leaders, and he says, listen, you've got to put this in perspective, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God is the one who caused it to grow." Second Corinthians 3:5, Paul says, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."

Now notice how he finishes here in 1 Corinthians 12:6, "the same God works," this is the verb form of effects, "the same God works all things," that is, every spiritual result, "in all people." God sovereignly determines what the results in every single case will be. For example, if you have the gifts of an evangelist, the gifts that an evangelist usually has, I don't mean that being an evangelist is a giftedness, I mean that's a position in Christ's church, but it usually comes with a package of gifts, use those gifts diligently, but remember that every true convert is the result of God granting repentance and faith, of God causing the seed that you plant to grow. Let's say you have the gift of exhortation, don't forget that the smallest step a believer makes toward spiritual maturity is solely the work of God. If you have the gift of teaching, Mark, remember that every time a single person truly understands biblical truth through your teaching, it's not the result of your academic abilities, your clever outline, your illustrations, it's the work of the illumination of the Spirit. It's God who causes or effects all things, all spiritual results in all people.

You and I must be diligent. We must apply ourselves. We must work hard. We must use the wisdom that God gives us in our ministries of various kinds in the church, but if you can come to truly understand that it is God that sovereignly produces the results then, number one, it will keep you from being discouraged because your ministry isn't succeeding like someone else's is succeeding, and two, it will protect you on the opposite end from becoming proud because your ministry surpasses that of others, because you don't get the credit either way. We are responsible to be good stewards. We are to work like it all depends on us, but we must constantly remind ourselves that it all depends on God. So, God sovereignly distributes varieties of gifts, varieties

of services or contexts in which it will be used, and results, but there's only one divine purpose for all this diversity.

The fourth foundational principle Paul sets forth in this passage is that God has prescribed the purpose of your gift. Look at verse 7, here's the purpose of spiritual gifts, "each one," by the way, each one is in the emphatic position in the Greek text, he means every single Christian. In fact, notice down in verse 11, "the one and the same Spirit distributes to each one individually just as He wills." Romans 12:3 says, "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." First Peter 4:10, "each one has received a special gift."

Understand, the New Testament is clear, and I know there's some debate about this in today's world, but without exception, every Christian has been given by God spiritual giftedness to fill a role in the body of Christ. Notice here in verse 7 he says you've been "given the manifestation," each one has been "given the manifestation." The Greek word for manifestation means exhibition, display. The gifts God has given each one of us are not private, they're intended to be seen. We could translate it, "to each one is given the display the Spirit produces," but the display isn't designed to call attention to ourselves. Instead, notice, the display is "for the common good." Literally, the text says it is for profit. It's to profit others. That's why Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another." It's for the common good. Your gift isn't for you. It's not for you to shine. It's not for you to make a name for yourself. It's to assist the rest of the body.

Whatever abilities and skills God has given you He didn't intend for you use those to try to make a name for yourself, to impress others in the church, nor did He intend, are you ready for this, nor did He intend that you keep that gift to yourself, refusing to invest the capacity He's given you in the church. God's plan was that every single Christian in this church would have a specific giftedness to fill a specific role in this local manifestation of the body of Christ. His plan was that you would use that ability in the church for the good of everyone else, serving one another. But serving one another is not the ultimate purpose of spiritual gifts. The ultimate purpose isn't mentioned here in this text. Keep your finger there and turn over to 1 Peter 4. Here's the ultimate purpose, 1 Peter 4:10,

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do it as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do it as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that [*here's the goal, the ultimate goal,*] so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

There is the reason God has done all this. Again, it's not about us. It is to serve one another, but the ultimate goal is not even serving one another. The ultimate goal is so that God would get the glory through His Son and through His Son's bride, the church.

So, understand, as you are ordained tonight Mark, and for the rest of us as we serve in this place, God has chosen the character of your gift. God has decided the context in which you will use that giftedness. God has determined the results of your efforts, and he's prescribed the purpose, the primary purpose in this life is serving the church, as you plan to do, and ultimately through that to glorify God and His Son.

So what are the timeless lessons for us that flow from the apostle's argument here? Let me just give you a couple things to think about, for all of us. Number one, don't mistake the effective use of your gift with the presence of true personal holiness. Those are two different things. According to 1 Corinthians 1:7 the Corinthians were "not lacking in any gift," but that same crew was terribly spiritually immature. There were petty divisions. They were suing each other. They were running their Christian liberty out to the edge. Their love feasts had become drunken brawls. It's easy to assume, and this is a danger you have to be aware of Mark, it's easy to assume that if God is using you in your ministry that also means that you are personally holy in all that you ought to be, but it's not true for any of us. I reminded myself many times that if we're tempted to think that using our gift effectively is the same thing as being truly spiritual, we just have to remember that God once spoke very effectively, His message, through a donkey.

Number two, learn to value the diversity of gifts God has placed within the church. It's good that our whole bodies aren't all eyes, and it's good that this body has diversity. Don't let that frustrate you, embrace that diversity. It's okay that they're not all like you are, they won't be. Number three, don't become discontent with your giftedness as you compare it to others. There will be some, in every case there are those who excel our giftedness, we can't let ourselves be discontent with that. On the other hand, don't consider your gift to be more important than others. It's all a matter of God's sovereignty. "If you received it, then why do you boast as if you did not," Paul says.

Number five, expend the maximum effort to make progress in the use of your gift. Just because God is sovereign doesn't mean we don't have responsibilities. We must expend maximum effort. We've been told to make progress. Number six, develop a constant awareness that God is sovereign in these ways, the character of your gift, the context of your service, and the results of your efforts. Constantly remind yourself, bring yourself back to this text, remind yourself that God is in charge of all of this for His glory.

And finally, determine to have the right motives as you use your gifts, to serve others, to build up the body, and to glorify the Lord. Here is the biblical mindset that we are to have in ministry, and as you're ordained to the ministry tonight Mark, don't lose sight of this,

there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this time tonight to study Your word. Lord, remind us all of what You have done in our lives, that, if You've saved us, You've gifted us to serve and fill a role in the body of Christ. Forgive us Father for not taking that seriously. Forgive us for behaving as if we can be spectators in the church, as if a part of our body could just be a spectator. Father, remind us that You have gifted us to serve, to serve one another, and ultimately, to serve You by bringing glory to You. Lord, may every person here tonight commit to fill the role You've given them, to get involved in the life of the church, so that You can use the church to direct them to the ends to which You've gifted them. Bless this time, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.