



Group Leader Devotional

BY RACHEL FORREST

FIRST, READ 1 PETER 4:7-11.

While I'm writing this, it is the Christmas season. Holiday gift guides are bombarding my inbox and Instagram stories. It is the time of year where everyone focuses on gifts - both giving and receiving.

WHAT IS THE BEST GIFT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED? WHAT MADE IT SPECIAL?

I received one of my favorite gifts on Christmas when I was 12 years old. My family had a traditional holiday meal that my great aunt prepared every year: homemade dumplings. From my early childhood, I remember watching as she rolled out dough, cut the rectangular shapes and cooked them in a rolling boil of homemade broth. Each holiday, she would include me in the dumpling-making process, giving me more responsibility as my maturity allowed. I loved spending that time in the kitchen with her, covered in flour and immersed in the scents of cooked celery, onions and fresh dough.

The year I turned 12, there was a large gift bag with my name on it under the Christmas tree. When my turn to open a gift came around, I excitedly tore into it to reveal a pastry cutter, a rolling pin, and a stockpot: my very own dumpling-making supplies. It was a treasured gift of passing the baton (or rolling pin, if you will) of being chosen as the one to carry on a family tradition from one generation to the next.

READ 1 PETER 4:7-11 AGAIN. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE GIFTS WE HAVE AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS?

Peter wrote this letter to those who were suddenly strangers in society because of their new faith in Christ. In chapter 1, he addressed them as "exiles," speaking not of the Jewish exile but of Gentile believers who were spiritual outcasts in the pluralistic religious scene of ancient Rome. This section of text is also sometimes titled "End-time Ethics." Peter has some things to say that are especially relevant for us today, in the time and place we find ourselves living right now. As followers of Jesus, we are strangers in this world because of what we believe and how we practice it, and what a great responsibility we have as Christ's church to continue to live out a witness of Christian ethics in a morally corrupt time.

LOOK UP 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-7. HOW DOES PAUL DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SALVATION AND GIFTS IN THIS PASSAGE?

Paul shows us there is a relationship between the grace of God in Christ Jesus and the gifts that grace bestows on us. He says grace was given to us by Christ Jesus and that whoever has this grace does not lack any spiritual gift (verse 7). He also says that in this way, the testimony about Jesus is confirmed, demonstrating a unique missional and evangelistic relationship to our gifts as well. Our gifts testify, or witness, to the truth of Jesus' saving work.

READ 1 PETER 4:7-11 AGAIN. LOOK CLOSELY AT VERSE 10. ACCORDING TO PETER, WHAT IS THE PURPOSE FOR OUR GIFTS?

The big idea of the larger portion of this text speaks about living in community as believers, and how living out God's will in community involves serving one another with our gifts for the end result of others coming to faith in Jesus too. Peter says in verse 10, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." The word for gift is *charisma*, which means an undeserved benefit of grace. In the New Testament, it is used only of benefits received from God, both referring to the gift of salvation by grace that we receive in Christ Jesus and the spiritual gifts God gives to us after we've been saved.

When we think about receiving a gift, we usually understand it to be received as something special for us. Whether it's a new pair of comfy slippers or a brand new bicycle for our child, we usually expect gifts to be used and enjoyed primarily by the receiver. However, like my dumpling-making tools from Christmas long ago, our gifts are meant to be used to bless others. "Charisma is the instantaneous enablement of the Holy Spirit in the life of any believer to exercise a gift for the edification of others."¹ Edification, from the verb to edify, means for the instruction or benefit of others, to uplift them.

The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer.

1 PETER 4:7

HOW ARE YOU USING YOUR GIFTS TO UPLIFT OTHERS? HOW HAVE OTHERS USED THEIR GIFTS TO BENEFIT OR LIFT YOU UP?

Peter reminds us in this verse that when we use our gifts in service for others, we are good stewards of the grace of God. Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 4, Peter affirms the relationship between the grace of God in Christ Jesus, the truths of the Gospel, and our spiritual gifts. Look up 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. Who is present when we use our gifts?

Spiritual gifts are the visible reality of the work of the Spirit in our lives. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and Peter in 1 Peter 4 both affirm that God's presence is made known in and through the use of spiritual gifts. This is why there is a Gospel element to spiritual gifts. When we use our gifts, it can result in people coming to faith in Christ as they experience the presence of God and His grace through our gifts.

ARE YOU USING YOUR GIFTS TO DRAW OTHERS INTO GOD'S PRESENCE? HOW CAN YOU USE YOUR GIFTS TO SHOW GOD'S GRACE TO THOSE WHO DO NOT YET BELIEVE IN JESUS IN SALVATION? HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR THE SAKE OF ADVANCING THE GOSPEL IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHEN YOU GO HOME?

¹ [Spiros Zodhiates (2014). (p. 1471). Complete Word Study Dictionary, The. AMG Publishers. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.com>]