

An Overview of Gifts and Ministries

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

Part I

May 1998

We all are familiar with the wonderful way God called Isaiah to be a prophet. During a vision he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Go and tell my people thus and so." (See Isaiah, 6.) Wouldn't it be great if we all were called by the Lord into our ministry and gifts the way Isaiah was? That sure would be simple, wouldn't it. And, best of all, we would just know what our ministry call was and which gifts we would have. But, for most of us, our ministry and gifts are discovered over a period of time and with training.

In several of our past teaching articles we have covered the ministries of the apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, and evangelist. In this teaching we will examine the remaining ministry calls emphasizing the gifts the Apostle Paul lists in Romans 12, and in 1 Corinthians 12.

Paul's Overview

Paul gives us what I call the job description of the church in Ephesians, 4.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until 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. (Eph 4:11-13 NIV)

Let us examine these verses in detail. First Paul lists the five-fold ministries or offices of the church, the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. Since our previous articles have covered each of these in detail, I will go on and ask the question:

What Is the Purpose of the Five-Fold Ministry?

The work of the apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists is to **prepare God's people for works of service.** "God's people" here refers to everyone in the church, everyone who is born again. This means that God has a **work of service, or ministry** for everyone. That's why everyone in the church has a ministry call.

Why Did God Give Everyone A Ministry?

Paul answers, "so that the body of Christ may be built up..." From these verses it appears that God expects His church to function as follows: The apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists are in the church to prepare the people for works of service. Why? So that the body of Christ can in turn build the church up. The ultimate goal the Lord has set in these verses is that ". . . 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." (v. 13)

Did This Only Apply to the First Century Church?

Absolute not! It still applies to today's church. How do we know? Because as long as there are those in the church who aren't mature and those who do not measure up to the fullness of Christ, then the work of the church is to continue.

So the job of building the church up is that of the people.

In today's church it is most unfortunate that many expect the pastor to do it. After all, they say, "isn't that what we pay the pastor to do?" Maybe so. But this wrong thinking is probably why so many churches aren't being built up very much these days. Jesus didn't call the pastor to do the job the people in the church are supposed to be doing.

Works of Service

Now that we understand that the five-fold ministries exist to prepare God's people for works of service, let us define works of service. I define a work of service as being any service performed by a Christian in or for the body of Christ or to spread the gospel. It is within this broad definition of service that the various gifts are used. And the operation of these various gifts by the individual Christian constitutes his or her ministry. As we have already said, everyone has a ministry. It is the faithful stewardship of our gifts which constitute our ministry.

There is a more narrow usage of service in Acts, six when the early church was trying to establish some order in its ranks. The specific instance had to do with the growing problem of the daily distribution of food to the widows among the believers.

"So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'" (Acts 6:2-4 NIV)

The above phrase "wait on tables" may also be translated as "serve tables." The main purpose of this segment of Scripture is to establish the office of deacon. But, as we have seen, all are called to serve the church. I believe Peter was alluding to this same broader call of service upon every Christian when he said,

If anyone **speaks**, he should do as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone **serves**, he should do it with the strength God provides. . . (1 Pe 4:11 NIV, emphasis added.)

Elevating the Concept of Service

Until Jesus came, being a servant was very demeaning. Servants had low social standing. Jesus' teaching turned this view upside down, literally. He raised the idea of serving God and others to the highest plane. He taught that "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." (Mk 9:35 NIV) He demonstrated His teaching of servanthood by washing His disciples' feet.

Jesus took the commandment to "love one's neighbor as oneself" as the basis of service to others. Until Jesus came those were mere religious words. Jesus made them a reality by setting the example for us to follow. He made no distinction in *kind* of service. His emphasis was on *faithfulness* of stewardship.¹

Thus, we know, both from Jesus' words and His deeds, that from God's view one who serves others in the church is in an exalted position. Therefore, those who are called to ministries of service in the church do indeed have a high calling. Peter

exhorts us, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Pe 4:10 NIV)

Now we will look into the ministry gifts to determine what each actually means. At the outset I want to confess that this has been a difficult study because, 1) there is quite an overlap among Paul's three lists, and, 2) he lists some functions that may well be part of another ministry, or office.

Also, as this study begins we must bear in mind the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Often a person may excel in two, three, or more of these gifts. We should also be aware that one's ministry does not always remain the same. Philip began using his ministry gifts as a server (deacon) and ended up in the ministry call of evangelist. Therefore, as one grows in spiritual maturity, the Lord may well extend additional callings. Certainly the parable of the talents tells us this.

Paul's Lists of "Gifts"

Paul gives us three different lists of gifts that I have called ministry gifts.

One list is in Romans 12:6-8, another is in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10, and a third is in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Rom 12:6-8 NIV)

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Co 12:4-11 NIV)

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. (1 Co 12:28 NIV)

To aid in our analysis, I divide the above gifts into two groups, spontaneous ministry gifts and ongoing ministry gifts.

a. Spontaneous Ministry Gifts

This category of gifts can only operate spontaneously, prompted at the moment by the Holy Spirit. These gifts include, 1) prophesying, 2) works of power (miracles), 3) gifts of healing, 4) words of wisdom, 5) words of knowledge, 6) distinguishing between spirits, 7) different kinds of tongues,

8) interpretation of tongues, and 9) faith.

In order for these gifts to operate, it requires the cooperation of the individual with the Holy Spirit at a given point in time. The operation of these gifts require the supernatural display of God's power expressed through the individual.

b. Ongoing Ministry Gifts

The second category are the gifts that are more ongoing in nature. They are inherent within the person and personality of the individual. They are so natural they often appear to be traits of someone's personality and are part of his or her daily life. These gifts include, 1) serving, 2) encouraging or exhorting, 3) giving, 4) leadership or governing, 5) showing mercy, and 6) gifts of administration. Of course these gifts also require the cooperation of the individual to be put into use but not in the same way as those which operate spontaneously.

For example, someone with the gift of mercy is easily able to show mercy to those he or she comes in contact with on an almost ongoing or continuing basis. It is an integral part of this person's whole being. I am not saying that the Lord's anointing is not on these people operating these ongoing gifts. I am saying the gifts themselves operate in a different way.

To help understand the gifts and ministries, I have divided them into the lists as follows:

Paul's Lists of Ministries & Gifts of the Holy Spirit

FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY GIFTS (Eph 4:11)	ONGOING MINISTRY GIFTS (Rom 12 & 1 Cor 12:28)	SPONTANEOUS MINISTRY GIFTS (1 Cor 12:8-10)
Apostle	Exhorter	Message of Wisdom
Prophet	Server	Message of Knowledge
Pastor	Giver	Faith
*Teacher	Helper	*Gifts of Healing
Evangelist	Administrator	*Miraculous Powers
	Mercy	*Prophecy
	[Leadership]	Distinguishing Between Spirits
		*Different Kinds of Tongues
		Interpretation of Tongues

*Also listed in Romans 12:6-8 or 1 Corinthians 12:28.

Ongoing Ministry Gifts

1. Exhortation Ministry

"... if it is encouraging, let him encourage..." (Rom 12:8 NIV)

What would the church do if it were not for those who encourage and exhort? These dear people fill a great need in the church. Their ministry shines during times of fear, worry or discouragement. They lift the spirits of the downcast in times of despair. They bring refreshment to the parched soul as fresh rain to the dry ground.

Let us look to the meaning of exhortation in the original text to help us understand more fully what the exhortation ministry is. The Greek word for exhortation is *parakl_V_i*, or *paraklasei*. The common, secular Greek use of the word meant

"to call to; to beseech; to exhort; to comfort." (Its noun form is the same word used by Jesus when He referred to the Holy Spirit as Comforter in John 15:26). The verb form is "to call to." It is used in the sense of "summoning to help . . . to call in a legal adviser . . . a request for coming to aid with reference to the physician."³

When speaking of the comfort Job received in the end, the Septuagint⁴ translators used *parakaleo* in Job 42:11. "All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They *comforted and consoled* him over all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him..."

In its purest sense God is the source of all true comfort. But we see that there are often human agents God used to exhort and comfort. The Prophet Isaiah is an excellent example. God told Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (40:1 NIV)

We see other examples in Scripture of God using His servants to comfort and encourage His people. Paul gives us the key to exhortation and comfort in 2 Corinthians.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (1:3-5 NIV)

I see two ways this gift operates in the church.

First, God has set in His church people who seem to have a natural ability to comfort and encourage. When there is sickness or tragedy, they seem to know exactly what to do and say. The troubled rejoice at the sight of the comforter sent by God with his or her God-given ability to encourage, comfort and uplift.

Second, God has placed exhorters in the church who are usually quiet and unassuming. However, when the need arises, the anointing of the Holy Spirit falls on that person and for a brief period of time his or her personality is transformed. He speaks clearly, powerfully, and straight to the point. Any discerning person listening knows that God is speaking directly through the exhorter. Once the occasion passes, the exhorter reverts back to his former personality. But for a brief time he or she has powerfully spoken God's word.

2. Serving In the Church

"If it is serving, let him serve . . ." (Rom 12:7 NIV)

Another ministry Paul lists in Romans, 12 is "serving." Since we have already discussed the call to serve in the very broad sense within the body of Christ, I will deal here with what I see as the more narrow gift of serving.⁵

I define this ministry gift as that ability to see and to step in and perform any work or act necessary or helpful for the ongoing ministry of the church. It certainly encompasses the office of deacon, but it extends beyond that.

People who are called by the Lord as servers rarely need to

be asked to do the work. They see what needs to be done and get involved in completing the task. Very often these people are rather quiet and are usually cheerful. They are comfortable working as part of a team and are usually very willing to let others lead. The work may be construction, running the sound system, keeping the nursery, cooking, or whatever the need is. A church prospers when there are abundant servers performing this ministry. It is such a valuable ministry gift.

3. Giving - Contributing to the Needs of Others

"If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously . . ." (Rom 12:8 NIV) The Greek text here addresses both giving and the attitude of the heart when one gives.

First, let's deal with what is usually given, money. Money is most often given to supply a need. The need may exist in either another person or the church.

Of course the general principle of giving applies to **all** Christians. We all are to be givers and tithers. We are all to give to the legitimate needs of others in the church as well as directly to the church.

But often, when someone has the gift of giving, he or she will be prosperous in the worldly sense. I believe that God gives exceptional wealth to certain people and sets them in the church to give to specific needs as the Holy Spirit directs. I knew of a man some years ago whom the Lord had blessed as a heavy equipment inventor. The more money he made the greater percentage of his earnings he gave to the Lord's work. Soon he was giving 90% of his money to the Lord's work and living on the remaining 10%! (But remember, the existence of such people in no way negates the obligation on the rest of us to be givers.)

Now let's deal with the attitude of the heart when we are giving. Here are some of the words used by various Bible translators to describe the Greek word for the giver's attitude of heart: simplicity, sincerity, purity, liberality arising out of simplicity and frankness of character.

We see this attitude demonstrated when Paul tells us how the Macedonian churches gave.

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. (2 Co 8:2-4 NIV)

These churches gave with overflowing joy. They gave beyond their ability. They even pleaded to be able to give! This is a clear example of how all of us are to give.

Of course, we may also give of things other than money. We can give of our food, time, our own goods, transportation, and so forth. God is pleased with any gift we give. He wants us to be free with what He has given us, whether it be little or much. He wants each of us to be so sensitive to the Holy Spirit that He can whisper to us to give and we eagerly run to obey. Conversely, could the failure to give to the Lord and His work be the reason some of God's people are so poor? A very sobering thought, isn't it?

When we honor God by our giving to the point that it becomes a life-style, God blesses and honors our giving.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you - because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty. (Mal 3:8-12 NIV)

I love the NIV's translation of 2 Corinthians 9:8:

". . .God loves a cheerful giver"!

4. Those Able to Help Others

". . . those able to help others . . ." (1 Co 12:28 NIV)

The Greek word for help here is *antilapseis*. Some of the English words it has been translated into are aid, assistance, one who aids or assists, a help. The idea in the original text means precisely what it means in English, one who helps others.

I believe this ministry refers primarily to those who apprentice themselves to someone already in full time ministry. These people are the Timothys and Barnabases of today who probably have a call on their lives as one of the five-fold ministries but who need to learn from those more mature in their call.

I have gathered a few Scriptures that convey this concept. Although in the Scriptures I have selected, not all of the Greek words used for help are *antilapseis*, they are examples that show this meaning of the gift.

I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. (Plm 13 NIV)

When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. (Act 13:5 NIV)

He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. (Act 19:22 NIV)

May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus. (2 Ti 1:18 NIV)

All who operate in this ministry greatly contribute to the gospel being preached. This is a very necessary and valuable ministry in the church, both to those who are helped as well as the helper.

In Part II of this teaching, we will finish with the ongoing gifts and then examine the spontaneous gifts. May you be blessed in your ministry gifts as you bless others!

1. The above description of Christian service is edited from the definition of *diakoneo* (deacon) found in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Fredrich, editors, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich., Vol II, Pages 81-86.
2. One who is a giver or an exhorter may, from time to time, be led to spontaneously give or exhort. Thus, these two gifts overlap or go back and forth between spontaneous and ongoing gifts.
3. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Fredrich, editors, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich., Volume 5, Page 774.
4. A Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament made by Greek influenced Jews around 250 BC.
5. There seems to be an overlap between the gift of serving and the gift of "helps." Many who fall into the serving category may also consider themselves as having a "helps ministry." I have addressed the separate gift of helps as number 4. below.

HUNDREDFOLD MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL

P. O. Box 625
Blue Jay, CA 92317

Telephone 909/336-9701

E-mail: jim.murphy@hundredfold.org Web site: www.hundredfold.org

Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l provides in-country Bible school courses and leadership training seminars. The classes and seminars are taught by seasoned, anointed teachers. The subject matter is directed towards the development and maturing of Christian leaders. The goal of the Ministry is to produce leaders who will be better equipped to lead and direct national churches.

All of Hundredfold Ministries training material is available from our web site listed above. Pastors in the Developing Nations may receive this material free of charge by going on our web site and requesting it.