

Sermon February 19 Surrender and Surprise

Introduction:

The New Testament says that every Christian believer is given spiritual gifts determined by the Holy Spirit. But it's not exactly a blank check we can fill out and use as we want. Nor is our reception of these gifts based on our worthiness. Today I'd like to lay another foundation for the gifts – the need for Surrender. But I also want to encourage You with what happens when God shows up – as God promises. So, the theme today is Surrender **and Surprise**.

One of our objections to being fully surrendered or used by God is that we know our own brokenness and so we think we are not worthy to receive and use the gifts He gives us. Therefore, let me start with this Chinese folk tale of a broken pot.

TWO POTS (A Chinese folk tale)

An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half-full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do.

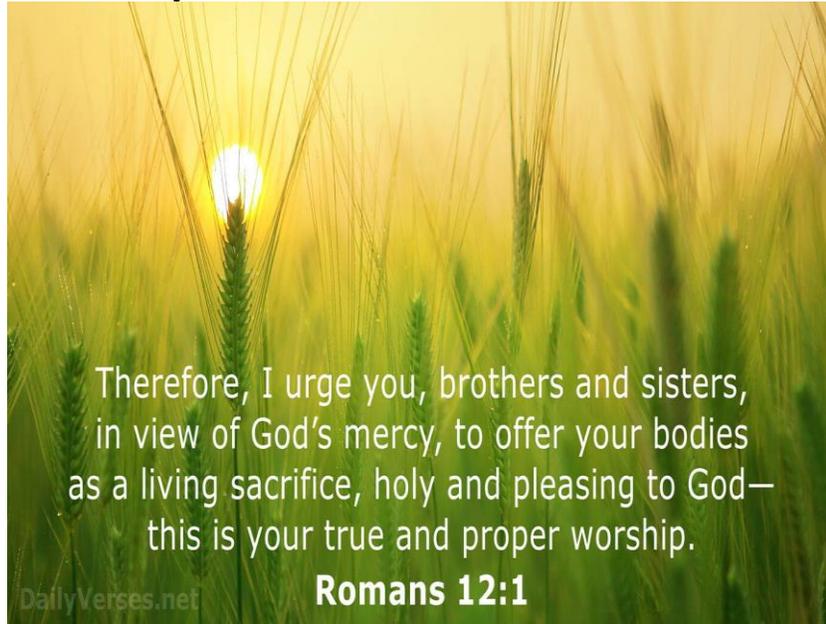


After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house." The woman smiled, "Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always

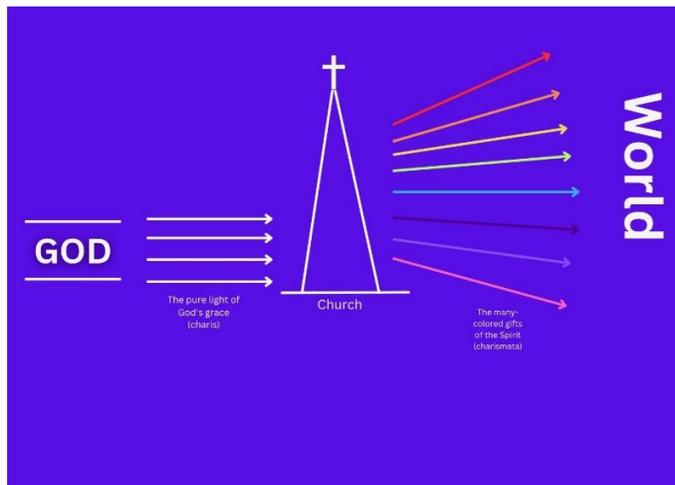
known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them. "For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace my house!" Each of us has our own unique flaws. But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. You've just got to take each person for what they are and look for the good in them.

This story was sent to me with the title: To all of my cracked pot friends! And so, I give it now to you! God delights to use cracked pots!! Let us pray.

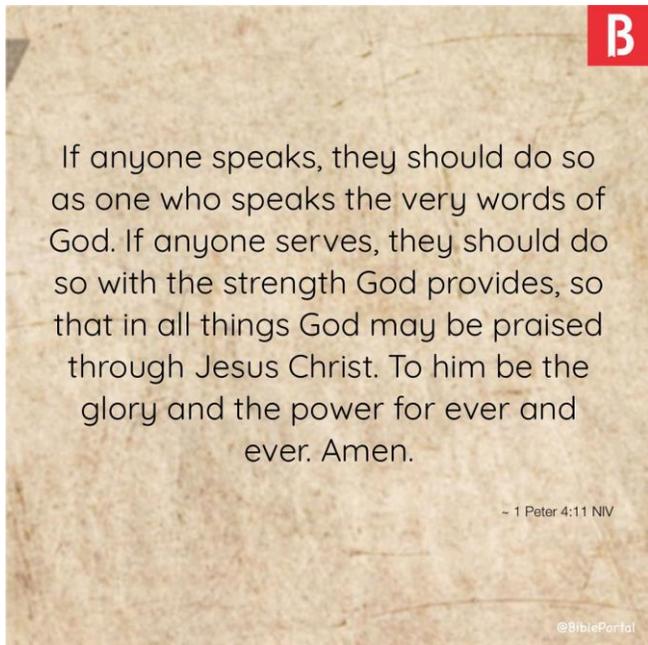
The necessity of surrender



Spiritual gifts are God's free gifts to each Christian. But they will not be usable if we are not surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ and willing to follow His leading. Only then will God take us places and enable us to do things we never would have thought possible. The Apostle Peter says there are speaking gifts and serving gifts.



Put in the prism of the church they become what the Passion translation calls “the multicolored tapestry of God’s grace.” 4:11. This is our goal here – that as each of us surrenders our lives to the Lord and uses our gifts by His power, the multicolored grace that will shine through us corporately will spread out all over our region – and beyond!



In using our speaking gifts, we can speak the oracles of God! I pray this every week because I don't have enough wisdom or energy or charisma to be that kind of preacher and Shepherd among you. But the Lord can make this happen. I think of the instance this fall that many of you were involved in. It was in the death of Tom and Susan Clouser's son Christopher Albright. When Chris was killed, I was called by Jayne Mann and asked to do Christopher's funeral. I had done many funerals before in the Wheaton area for church members or Belmont Assisted Living residents, but I always knew the deceased person or their family members and so could tailor the funeral around those memories and associations. But I had not yet done a funeral at Ogden Dunes. I had never met either Tom nor Susan. I didn't know Chris nor the other members in the family. But I responded to God's invitation and so prepared while great prayer went up for their

consolation and my being God's presence and help to them in this time of great sorrow and distress. As I was praying about meeting the family and doing the funeral, I remembered this verse in I Peter 4:11 and just claimed that I could speak as an oracle of God – speaking God's very words and being a Shepherd serving them with all the strength God supplies. And God did it! No credit to me – only praise to the Lord who fulfills his promise!!

That's what can happen through each of us as we use the gifts God has given us – by His power for His glory. . . We surrender ourselves to the Lord, then step out in faith as He leads us and watch God show up.

Yet even when we believe this in our heads, sometimes the results can surprise us. When God is leading us, amazing things can happen. Hence my sermon title Surrender and Surprise.

Here's a story that surprised all those involved many decades ago. It's about a woman named Agnes. When Agnes heard God's marching orders, they were simply to pray and believe God. **Here's what happened.**

"During World War II, she volunteered as a Grey Lady in the Red Cross, working in Tilton Army Hospital at Fort Dix, New Jersey. There, amid wounded soldiers sent home from the battlefields, she was given "a two-level cart filled with cigarettes, comic books and adventure magazines, candy, cookies, and sometimes flowers or fruit. The women were to cover a certain section of wards, greeting each soldier with a cheery word and offering him his choice from the wagon."

As a Christian, Agnes would silently pray for the men. On Ward 17, she met Frederick, who lay in a private room, because he was about to die. She says, 'He was so gaunt and shriveled that he looked like a wizened old monkey. His skin was yellow, the ribs protruded, and the skin fluttered between them as he breathed. There were tubes in both nostrils and attached to both wrists. And usually there was a doctor or nurse with him. "You look like you're about washed up," I said. (I had

found that the men liked this direct, unvarnished approach.) "Yep," he said. "What's the trouble?" I asked; I could see no wounds, nor could I smell any osteomyelitis. "Blood clots," he replied, unilluminatingly. "This," thought I, "should not be too difficult to heal." Therefore I told him of the power that might help him get well. He was not interested. In fact, he shut his eyes, a clear dismissal... "Listen," I said at last, causing him by my forceful tone to open his eyes. "If you'll just let me try, the way I told you, I promise I'll never mention the matter again, win or lose. Now how about it?" "Okay," he said wearily, with a definite lack of enthusiasm. Whereupon he drew back the sheet, and I saw to my horror that his abdomen looked like a pool of dark blood, barely covered by a thin membrane. "Guts torn out," he said, noting my dismay. "They didn't want to carry me in from the battlefield, but I told them they had to."...

[Frederick] had been kept alive for months by intravenous feeding, drugs, and stimulants. If I had seen his abdomen at first, without stomach or any other digestive organ as far as I could tell, I would not have spoken the word of faith. But there it was, and I could not retract it. So I laid my hands on the two sides of this red gaping pool of blood and visioned a stomach and all other organs perfect and called upon the Lord to bring this about.

When I reached home, I telephoned every powerful prayer group that I knew and called for help... And I myself prayed for a miracle to take place in Frederick. This would require an out-and-out miracle. This was no speeding up of normal healing processes. Nothing could do this except the direct work of God through Jesus Christ. The next week I passed his room with fear and trembling, but he was asleep and I did not go in. A week later, two weeks after our prayer, I again passed his room. It was empty. He was not in his bed. But the bed was rumpled, his things were scattered about, and his name was still upon the door. I went on to the common room at the end of the ward where men sat about in wheelchairs, but I did not see him. Then across the room my eyes fell upon a young, good-looking, ruddy-faced man who bore not the slightest resemblance to the wizened old monkey for whom I had prayed in the cell. The young man gazed at me with a twinkle in his eyes and a knowing grin, and presently I noticed that there was a tiny shade of resemblance.

"You can't be Frederick, can you?" I asked him. His grin broadened. "Yes, ma'am, I am," he said. Remembering my promise, I made no reference to his healing but simply said, "What are you going to do now?" "Think I'll go to South America and get a job," he replied.... The next week, he was not in his cell. He was discharged and at home. Later I had a brief talk with a chaplain. I recounted the story of Frederick, for I knew that he visited in Ward 17 and must have seen the young man. "Is that what happened to him?" he cried in amazement.... "Soon as he could get out of bed, he was down in my office every day," said the chaplain. "He wanted a Bible. He wanted to know all about God and about Jesus Christ." *Agnes Sanford, Sealed Orders (Logos International, 1972), pp. 178-9, 185-7*, And he went on to South America.

Now that's an amazing miracle and an incident that brought God great glory. But I expect it also elicited no small amount of surprise to Agnes and praise to the Lord for all who had joined her in praying for Frederick. This incident also gave her encouragement to use her gifts of healing prayer throughout her lifetime – and more miracles happened.

The amazing thing about using the spiritual gifts God gives us is that we become His hands and feet as we go and serve others and His voice as we speak His word to others. So let God surprise you as He works through you and you see what you do under His direction and with His gifting transform people and bring His reality and power and grace into people's lives.

The stories seem endless of these truths as you read biographies and Christian history over the centuries. This is why I maintain we can be history makers. That's another whole sermon series that combines the stories of famous people in the Bible with contemporary people today who have lived similar lives of faith. We may do that in the fall.

In learning to understand and develop our spiritual gifts we are joining God in what the Lord wants to do. And that's the adventure of faith we all can be on. But it does require our surrender to Christ's Lordship so we work at His direction with His calling.



Therefore, beloved let's let God surprise us as we go forward in this adventure together. Surrender and Surprise. Praise the Lord. Amen. Let us pray.

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