

Sermon Feb 26 – Fear or Fulfillment?

Introduction - Lifestyle Evangelism

In our drama today Deanna was just having a normal conversation with a new work-out friend when suddenly the conversation turned to religion and she got scared: “You don’t have any questions now, do you? , , ,Lord, Help me! I don’t have the gift of evangelism. Send Billy graham!” Deana knew enough scripture to know there is a gift of evangelism but did not know enough to discern if she had that dreaded gift. She felt small in light of the needs of the world. She needed this reminder:

She also needed to remember that spiritual gifts is not about us – how worthy or how inadequate or how distracted we are. Its all about the greatness of our God and what His plans for the world are – that include YOU.

So in the next few weeks we will describe each of the spiritual gifts more fully and help you discern what God has given you. That’s why the sermon is titled “Fear or fulfillment?!” **Let us pray**

The Grace gifts described in Romans 12

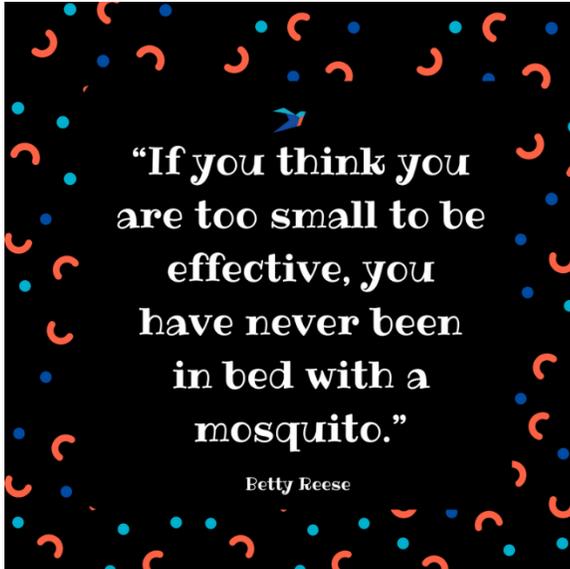
If Deana had been given the spiritual gift of evangelism, Ann’s questions would have led her to focus, not on religion or the rules of the Bible but on Jesus – who He is, what He’s done and what response He is inviting Ann to make to Him: “Come to Me,” Jesus says. “Come to Me.” And when a believer does have the gift of evangelism, they don’t need Billy Graham, they just need to trust the Spirit to empower their words and attitudes so they speak the very oracles of God and people do turn to Jesus. Fear vanishes as we move in the arena of calling God has for us.

In fact, it was my dear prayer partner and friend Naomi Brown who led my Dad to receive Jesus. She is not big in the world’s eyes but she sure is big in her heart and in what she believes God can do. Her relationship with my Dad was a miracle in itself. He had determinedly avoided any talk of Christ for decades after I became a Christian, but he also had no friends who were African Americans. Yet he listened to Naomi and followed her lead in trusting Jesus. She had trusted God for the supernatural grace gift of evangelism He had given her and it opened Daddy’s heart. Awesome.

Evangelism may seem out of range for many people but our text for today describes some of the more commonly accepted spiritual gifts God gives to believers. I had it read in the *Passion Translation* because I feel it more thoroughly explains each gift:

God’s marvelous grace imparts to each one of us verifying gifts and ministries that are uniquely ours. So if God has given you the grace-gift of prophesy, you must activate your gift by using the proportion of faith you have to prophesize. If your grace-gift is serving, then thrive in serving others well; if you have the grace-gift of teaching, then be actively teaching and training others; if you have the grace-gift of encouragement, then use it often to encourage others. If you have the grace-gift of giving to meet the needs of others, then may you prosper in your generosity without any fanfare. If you have the gift of leadership, be passionate about your leadership. And if you have the gift of showing compassion, then flourish in your cheerful display of compassion. (*The Passion Translation Rom.12:6-8*).

Let me work backwards from that list – the last shall be first idea 😊 The word compassion is also translated mercy – show mercy cheerfully. The Greek word involved in mercy actually means “sunbeams dancing in a



dark room.” Isn’t that terrific? If someone has been knocked down with sickness or loss or defeat or sorrow, a person with mercy gifts comes alongside – not to preach or admonish or chastise the person for their misjudgments or lack of faith or whatever. They come to bring Jesus’ light into the darkness of the person’s environment or thoughts or misconceptions. Sunbeams dancing in a dark room. Life has many setbacks and causes of suffering. This is why I am offering the 8 week course called Mending. It is not only for those who grieve the loss of a family member but those who need mending from family breakdowns, job loss, discouragement, doubt, depression and living focused on the rear view mirror of their past. But I am asking that not only they be in attendance but all those who have mercy gifts, the gifts deacons need, from our church be in attendance for their equipping as well. The gift of mercy.

Then there is leadership and the call to be passionate about our leadership – not heavy-handed and hierarchical but sensitive and filled with the love of the Lord as we lead. That leadership gift involves both serving in the strength of the Lord and speaking the very words of God as Peter says.

However, there are many who aspire to be leaders and test their popularity by how many people follow them. One bright young person made this decision:

I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles. Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell passersby what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I have done the night before, what I will do later, and with whom. I give them pictures of my family, my dog, and of me gardening, taking things apart in the garage, watering the lawn, standing in front of landmarks, driving around town, having lunch, and doing what anybody and everybody does every day. I also listen to their conversations, give them the "thumbs up" and tell them I like them. And it works just like Facebook! I already have four people following me: two police officers, a private investigator, and a psychiatrist. 9/26/18 I laughed out loud at this story - Trying to be a leader with followers on our terms, not God’s!

The grace gift of giving means giving with abundant generosity. The Greek meaning is without restraint. Many times that gift comes out of gratitude. Practicing the power of gratitude is one avenue to healing in our torn lives and the book we will reference for my 8 week group on “Mending” has this story: Heinrich was a German young man of 19 who had been part of Hitler’s Youth and the outfit known as Waffen SS in World War II. He was captured by the British in World War II at age 19 and sent as a prisoner of war to a war camp in Perthshire Scotland. He found himself in the heart of a community that had the grace to treat him with kindness. He was befriended by local school children who chatted with him through the fence surrounding his prison. Over time as those children grew and he stayed on in the community, one became his wife! I don’t know if he became a Christian through her or the people in that village, but what made him newsworthy was following his death at the age of 90, it was revealed that he left his savings of £384 thousand pounds to the elderly in the village where he had been a prisoner. His will stated “herewith I would like to express my gratitude to the people of Scotland for the kindness and generosity that I have experienced in Scotland during my imprisonment of war and hereafter.” (*The Power of Gratitude*, Lois Blyth, Cico Books, p. 112) £384 thousand pounds is \$461,566.00 dollars in US currency. That’s a model of the amazing generosity God can empower through the grace-gift of giving.

The gift of encouragement is also a building-others-up kind of gift. Putting giving and encouragement together reminds me of Barnabas, the leader in the early church who went on the early mission trips with Paul. Barnabas was known as the Encourager. When his cousin John Mark left the first mission trip he had gone on with Barnabas and Paul, Paul refused to give Mark a second chance and include him on the second missionary journey. But Barnabas took Mark under his wing and took him back to their home country of Cyprus. We don’t hear from them again but when Mark does resurface in the book of Acts, he has obviously been mentored by Barnabas; he’s matured and is now Peter’s aide in writing Peter’s epistles and has become a vital help to Paul in

prison. That's the mark of what an encourager does who comes alongside another, cheering and admonishing him or her and helping that person rise to all God wants that one to be.

I expect he also greatly encouraged the church when he sold a piece of land and gave the money to the church. This would go a long ways in the support of their feeding program for the widows of the church (Acts 6), and the other acts of care and service the church was involved in. That's the gift of giving. However, like in efforts to be a leader on our own, people can try in their own ingenuity to copy the gift of giving to enhance their own reputation. This was the story of Ananais and Sapphira. Like Barnabas they also brought a large donation to the church. But they lied about the amount. They apparently gave, not to help others but to benefit themselves, because Peter's word of discernment to them was: ³⁻⁴ "Ananias, how did Satan get you to lie to the Holy Spirit and secretly keep back part of the price of the field? Before you sold it, it was all yours, and after you sold it, the money was yours to do with as you wished. So what got into you to pull a trick like this? You didn't lie to men but to God."⁵⁻⁶ Ananias, when he heard those words, fell down dead. *That* put the fear of God into everyone who heard of it. The younger men went right to work and wrapped him up, then carried him out and buried him." (The Message) His wife perpetuated the lie to Peter as well and she also fell down at Peter's feet and died when Peter called her out. It's a holy God we are serving, beloved, and the reason He gives us spiritual gifts is that the **work He wants in His kingdom need His power, His pure motives, for His glory.**

So, too, if we are teaching in God's name, we better be using our grace-gift of teaching, teaching God's truths with the integrity of character God makes possible. We also need the fruit of the Spirit in our character, as one teacher discovered: "A kindergarten teacher handed out a coloring page to her class. On it was a picture of a duck holding an umbrella. The teacher told her class to color the duck in yellow and the umbrella green. However, Rian, who always does things HIS way, colored the duck in a bright fire truck red. After seeing this, the teacher asked him: "Rian, how many times have you seen a red duck?" Young Rian replied with "The same number of times I've seen a duck holding an umbrella." Ah, the need for patience and a great senses of humor as we teach!

However, there have been teachers noted throughout scripture who teach false doctrines – teaching the worship of angels (Gal 4) or “myths or endless genealogies” (I Tim.1:3-4). Paul says some “abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come from hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron (I Tim.4:1-2). Holy smoke! Not what God has in mind.

In the same way the spiritual gift of prophecy in our Romans passage has been greatly abused by people who say they speak from God but are NOT delivering the words of God. They say “Peace, peace” where there is no peace. (Jer.6:14 and 8:11). A scriptural understanding of a prophet from God is one who speaks forth the mind and counsel of God; it is one who edifies, warns and exhorts believers in God's name. There are multitudes of false prophets in our day, beloved – people who falsely predict the future or say a word in an assembly or through the internet or preaching that has not come from the counsels of God. This is why the scripture says that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. In godly Pentecostal services where this gift is more often used (and abused) that means that no one should stand up and say in the language of the people or in tongues this is what God says without first brining that message before the others in the church who have the gifts of discernment, wisdom or prophesy itself. If the word is confirmed by a designated team of Spirit-filled

people who are also prophets, sensitive to receiving the consels of God. When the new prophetic word is confirmed by this team, then it can go forth for the church.

Let me give you an example of the proper use of prophesy in the church. It occurred in Jim Cymbala's church, The Brooklyn Tabernacle church, a few decades ago. At the time Jim and Carol Cymbala's teenage daughter Chrissy had become involved in the drug culture in New York, and was living with a man who was everything the Cymbals did not want for their daughter. She had left the family and the church. There was virtually no communication between them. Jim and Carol and many in the church had been praying for Chrissy for a couple of years. At the time of this story – she was now 18, but no breakthrough was in sight. Yet at one Tuesday night church-wide prayer meeting (which by this time numbered several hundred) a woman sent a handwritten note up to Pastor Jim during the prayer time. Jim knew this young woman was spiritually sensitive. The note said, "Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting and all pray for your daughter." Jim hesitated. Was it right to change the flow of the service and focus on my personal need? Yet something in that note seemed to ring true." In his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* Jim described what happened next as he brought that word before the congregation. The meeting "the church turned into a labor room." Pg.64. There arose a groaning, a determination, as if to say, "Satan, you will NOT have this girl. Take your hands off her – she's coming back!" And 2 days later Chrissy returned to her home and fell on the kitchen floor rocking on her hands and knees and sobbing, "Daddy – Daddy – I've sinned against God. I've sinned against you and Mommy. I've sinned against myself. Please forgive me" Jim pulled her up close to him as they sobbed together. Then she pulled back and asked, with the voice of an attorney, "Daddy, who was praying for me? Who was praying for me?. . . On Tuesday night, who was praying for me?" The young woman who sent Jim that note at the prayer meeting Tuesday night had heard a word from God and delivered that word as a word of prophesy to Jim. It was the catalyst for the prayers that broke Satan's hold on Jim's daughter and brought her back to the Lord and to all that God has done as her life since then. She is now fully yielded to the Lord and serving him with her pastor husband, bringing much fruit to all those around her. Pp.62-66. This is how the gift of prophesy under the control of the Spirit can work.

I tell you, beloved when we are following the Lord and use the gifts of grace He gives us, wonderful things can happen in our lives, the church's life and the life of all those around us. But if we keep trying to do things by our own efforts or prideful understanding or deceitfulness, the results are definitely not good! That young woman at the prayer meeting at Jim Cymbala's church was not a leader in the church. But she was known as one who had spiritual sensitivity. She was accustomed to hearing the voice of God and was obedient to follow through on what the Spirit revealed to her. And look at what that unleashed in an entire church and in the life of a very lost, rebellious teenager.

In the same way the Spirit will direct each of us to use our gift for others:

*the meaning of
life is to find
your gift.*

*the purpose
of life is to
give it away.*

In mercy to go visit or bring food or care for someone who is sick or suffering, bringing the sunbeams of God dancing in a dark place; in leadership to follow the Spirit's lead in directing others to the Lord, not ourselves; in giving to give with abundant generosity and watch how that giving multiplies the blessing of God for others, in teaching to watch the truths of God's Word become the very guidance a person needs; in encouraging to build others up so they become all God intends for them to be. All this is what it means to be partners with God, beloved, and that's our high and holy calling. There is no need to be fearful if you are stepping out where God has called you to be. Instead, you will be fulfilled as you live out God's calling for your life. All praise to Him!

Let us pray. Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 2 26 23