

(1 Timothy) Do Not Neglect the Gifts

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen's sermon encourages believers to recognize and actively engage with their spiritual gifts for effective ministry in the church.

Duration: 55:58

Scripture: Acts 13:2, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Timothy 4:12-14

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Supernatural Ministry"

Description

In this sermon on 1 Timothy chapter 4, the speaker focuses on verse 14 and the importance of understanding the supernatural nature of Christianity. He shares the story of Jonathan Goforth, a missionary who struggled to learn the Chinese language but eventually realized that preaching the word of God is a supernatural act. The speaker emphasizes that Christianity is beyond human ability and strength, and that the gifts of the Spirit play a crucial role in spreading the faith. He briefly mentions the different gifts listed in the New Testament, including the gift of an apostle, and encourages Christians to rely on the supernatural power of God in the face of opposition and challenges.

Transcript

First Timothy chapter 4, once again, chapter 4. We're not getting out of chapter 4, but I think tonight will be our final study in the fourth chapter. But it's great for me as I'm reading through and looking to see what the Lord wants to share with us when all of a sudden, something clicks, a verse, a thought, and the great thing is when it's something that I hadn't previously thought of or planned to do, when that happens, I just sense, okay, this is something the Lord wants to speak to us about. Verse 14 really caught my attention a couple of weeks ago that we needed to take a little more closer look at what's stated here in verse 14.

Of course, we think we're all familiar now with the context. Paul is writing to Timothy. Timothy is his disciple and a young man who's involved in ministry.

Paul's left him in Ephesus to put things in order and so forth. You remember the context of the epistle is instructing Timothy on what the church is to look like, and what the Christians are to be doing, and those kinds of things. Then of course, as he's writing this epistle, he will also exhort Timothy and that's what he's doing here.

As we looked at previously, he exhorts Timothy not to let anyone despise his youth, but to be an example to the believer, and then tells him to be preaching, and teaching, and reading the scriptures until Paul

would come. But then in verse 14, he says, do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. The gift that is in you, Paul says to Timothy, don't neglect the gift.

Now, Timothy was gifted as a pastor and a teacher. Seems that those were his strong gifts. There would be somewhat of an apostolic gift as well.

Timothy's even acknowledged as an apostle along with Paul. Paul tells him in his second epistle to him to do the work of an evangelist. So you might see in Timothy not only the gifts of pastoring and teaching, but you probably could say that there was a bit of an apostolic gift there.

Getting the churches established, that's what he was doing. There was probably a bit of a gift as a prophet as well, speaking the word of God to the people. And there was evidently an evangelistic anointing upon his life too, and Paul exhorts him to do the work of an evangelist.

The ministry itself is to be conducted by people who are gifted by God. You see, the ministry is not like anything else in the world. It's not like any other profession.

It's something that requires for truly God-approved ministry to be happening. It actually requires a gifting of the Spirit. I have a good friend who's a professor at probably the most prestigious university in Britain.

It's the university that all of Oxford and Cambridge even draw their faculty from. He's a professor there. And he was part of our church when I was pastoring in London.

And he since has become the assistant pastor of the Calvary Chapel in the city of Oxford. His brother's the senior pastor of the church. So anyway, I was talking to him last year, and he was just sort of telling me some of his experiences now that he's moved into pastoral ministry, and telling me about these new experiences of teaching the Bible and these sorts of things.

And what he was telling me basically was that he feels like he is so ill-equipped and insufficient for this. And then he said to me, he said, you know, Brian, when I used to sit in Westminster and listen to you teach, I would sit there and critique. And he said, you know, I would think, well, you know, that's good.

And yes, you know, Brian's a teacher. And I could do that too, because I'm a teacher. And, you know, he has his PhD, and he's a professor.

And, you know, so he's telling me all of this. But he says, when I got that opportunity for the first time to stand up in front of the church and to share the word with them, he said, I felt like I had never spoken before an audience in my entire life. He said, I just fumbled through everything.

And he said, oh, it was just disastrous. And his whole point was to tell me that he's come to realize that the ministry is unique. There's nothing like it.

You might have a great gift in a natural sense to teach on a college level or something like that. But that does not necessarily mean that you will be able to teach in the ultimate sense that God desires His word to be taught, you know, as a person in ministry. Because that calls for a gift from God beyond a person's natural ability to do something.

It calls for a gifting of the Holy Spirit. But not just teaching. All of the activity that's done in the church is really to be done by people who are gifted by God.

The reality is this. We should not have anybody serving in the church in their own power or strength. Now, of course, all of us, even people who are gifted by God, will at times, you know, not depend on the Lord and, you know, step out and maybe, you know, try to do something in their own strength or whatever.

That's acceptable, understandable. It's a fact of life. It does happen.

But what I'm talking about is when you have people who downplay the importance of the supernatural, when you have people who deny the gifts of the Spirit and say things like, oh, those are no longer happening today. You know, that was something that occurred back in biblical times. But nowadays, we, you know, we don't have any of those gifts, those signed gifts in operation.

And we shouldn't be encouraging people in that direction or even be, you know, thinking about that. When you have people that have that mentality and they are the ones who are running a church, it's a sad thing. It's an unfortunate thing.

Because what you have at the end is you have a church with no power. It's got the power of man. It's got the power of human personality.

It's got the power of human ingenuity, perhaps. It's got the power of, you know, whatever man can conjure up. But that power doesn't go a long ways against the powers of darkness.

We need the power of God. And God never intended for one moment that His people would try to serve Him without the power of the Holy Spirit and without the giftings of the Holy Spirit. And the New Testament, you know, one thing you can't escape reading the pages of the New Testament, you can't escape it reading the Bible, for that matter.

The Bible reminds us over and over again that this is all about something supernatural. This is about something that's beyond man's mind, that's beyond man's strength, that's beyond man's ability to produce. It's beyond that.

We need to realize that. The Bible has much to say about the gifts of the Spirit. The New Testament, in four different places, speaks to us of the gifts of the Spirit.

And I want to go through all of the gifts that are listed in the New Testament and just briefly touch on them. There is the gift of an apostle. An apostle, what is an apostle? An apostle is somebody who is sent by God.

That's the meaning of the term. The apostle is the one who's sent by God to a people, to a place, with that empowering by God to plant the work of God. That's what the apostles did.

They went out and they planted the church of Jesus Christ all over the world. Now, there were originally these men, 12 in total. Judas, of course, defected.

And I believe Paul replaced him. But you have these 12 men who were the apostles of Jesus Christ. And Jesus sent them out into the world to plant His church all over the world.

The question arises, are there still apostles today? Yes, there are. Not in the same sense of those 12, because they did have some unique features to their ministry that are not repeated. But there are apostles still in the sense that God does send people to places to plant His church in regions.

He's still doing that today. And He gifts them to do it. He gives them power to do that thing.

One of the more recent persons that I think would clearly go down historically as an apostle would be J. Hudson Taylor. He pioneered the church in China. He was the apostle to the Chinese.

He's the man that God sent in to lay the foundation of the church for 40-something years as he was there. He laid the foundation of the church. And the church that exists in China today traces its ancestry back to Hudson Taylor.

William Carey, an apostle, an apostle to the people of India, another man who spent 40 years in India, laid the foundation for future ministry that would occur in that country. Translated the scriptures into 45 different dialects for the people. And so, we have examples in those two men.

Now, that's going back to the 1800s and even back a bit further with William Carey to the 1700s. But what about in the 21st century? Are there still apostles? Sure, there are. God is sending people to places today and using them to pioneer His work into those regions.

I've referred many times to Greg Opin, a good friend of ours who shared here a while back. I refer to Greg as the apostle to the Hungarians. God sent him to that place and we have now a great work of God going on in that country and Greg has been instrumental in that work developing.

You could look at maybe like a Nick Long as the apostle to Germany. God sent him into Germany 15, 18 years ago and now there's churches springing up all over the land and they're coming out of the ministry that God sent Nick in there to plant. And so, we have apostles today.

A good way to look at it is that God the Father had one apostle and that's Jesus Christ. According to Hebrews chapter 3, He is the apostle of our faith. God the Son had 12 apostles.

God the Holy Spirit has an innumerable number of apostles. God the Holy Spirit is still sending people out with apostolic authority. Then there are prophets.

Now, the difference between a prophet and an apostle is there's a thin line, but this is my own opinion. I think the difference is the apostles had that specific calling to pioneer the church into a community. The prophets would go alongside of them, but they were, in a sense, sort of the support team, not necessarily the one to spearhead it.

But they were men that were gifted to speak the word to the people of God. They were gifted to minister to the body of Christ in a larger sense than just, say, the pastor-teacher. Where the difference between a prophet and a pastor-teacher is that the prophet has a broader ministry, a larger audience, if you will, of a bigger voice, in a sense.

You know, there are many wonderful men, gifted men as pastors and teachers, and a pastor-teacher is a person who takes care primarily of an individual local congregation. But what makes a difference between a pastor-teacher and a prophet is that the prophet has a larger audience, a voice that goes beyond that local congregation. Pastor Chuck is fond of referring to himself as a pastor-teacher, which he is here at Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa.

But you could say that he would be in that category of prophet as well, because his voice has gone far beyond just this local congregation, hasn't it? His ministry has circled the globe, actually, impacted much

of the world. That's a prophetic ministry that's happening there. That's what we need to think of when we think of a prophet.

So, of course, I don't have to answer the question whether I believe there are prophets today. I do. But let me say this, just by way of clarification and a little bit of warning.

When I hear about men who like to present themselves as apostles and prophets, they want to be called apostle or prophet. Those are the ones that I have serious questions about the reality of that gifting in their life. A person who is gifted in that sense is not going to be, you know, verbally broadcasting.

Hey, now, listen to me. I'm a prophet. Hey, you better watch it.

You know, I'm an apostle. You don't mess with apostles. You know, somebody who's doing something like that, and they do that, believe me.

No, that's not what we're talking about. The person who is an apostle, the person who has this gift as a prophet, they're not going to be broadcasting that themselves. Other people will look to them and say, yes.

There's an apostolic authority in that person's life. There's a prophetic power in that person's life. It's obvious through, you know, the ministry that God has given them beyond just their local sphere, a much larger ministry.

But there are prophets in these days. I think a lot of the guys that we listen to on the radio, I think in many ways, you could categorize them in a sense as prophets because, again, they have a voice that goes beyond. Not every pastor is on the radio.

Not every pastor would have that kind of ministry where a radio type of a thing would be appropriate. They're wonderful at what they do in their local situation, but there's not that gifting that goes beyond that. Now, we skipped over evangelists, but that's just because I wanted to make the comparison between prophet and pastor-teacher.

But evangelists, we know, of course, an evangelist is somebody who's gifted to preach the gospel in the sense of preaching it to the unbeliever, but also gifted, I think, to stir up the body of Christ in regard to evangelism. You know, if we just depend on one person to be the evangelist, we're going to be, you know, it's not going to be good. Because, you know, that one person is going to have occasional opportunities, but it's going to be meager.

We need to think in terms of evangelists, not just the guy who goes into the stadium and preaches to the thousands, but the individual Christians who go off to work and share with the person sitting next to them, or, you know, talk with somebody at the grocery store, or whatever. But the evangelist, a person who's gifted as an evangelist in the church, is a person who has that gift to preach, but to the unbeliever, but also to really sort of stir up the believers in their passion and their desire for evangelism. Now, of course, Paul was a great evangelist, and Peter was a great evangelist.

These men were...there was, you know, kind of a blending of gifts in their lives. And on throughout history, we could look at men who had sort of that distinct calling as evangelist. We can think back into, oh, you know, the 17th century revivals, or the 18th century revivals.

Excuse me, you had men like John Wesley, who was a great evangelist. George Whitefield was a great evangelist. You come into the next century, and you have people like Charles Spurgeon, and then you have D.L. Moody, and then you come into the 20th century, and probably the premier evangelist of the 20th century was Billy Graham.

Well, earlier on, there was Billy Sunday, but then Billy Graham came into prominence in the 40s. And, you know, when you think of evangelist, Billy Graham is a person you think of, but I think we would also think of Greg Lurie when you think of an evangelist. I do.

And Greg has that gift, obviously. And we thank God for that gift, but we can't just depend on a harvest crusade every year to be the thing that, you know, the one time a year that, okay, now, if you want to get saved in July, we're going to have this thing. So, can you make it over to Anaheim's, whatever it's called now, Angel's Day, they're changing the name of that place all the time.

So, you know, but of course, but Greg's a good example of somebody who, when he's teaching, he's just, you know, there's something that's happening. I mean, people get fired up for evangelism just because of that gift that God has given him. And there are others, of course, that we could mention, but we've got a long list here, so we have to move on.

But then we come to gifts of miracles, gifts of miracles. There are those in the body of Christ who are gifted in the area. Now, I don't know that I've ever met anybody who has this gift of miracles.

And I don't even know, as a matter of fact, I kind of doubt that anybody has a permanent gift of miracles, like a gift of teaching. You know, when God gives you a gift of teaching, it's with you, it stays with you. You have to cultivate it.

You have to work on it, but it's there. I don't sit at home, you know, worrying before I come out here on Saturday nights about whether or not the gift of teaching is going to be with me. I expect it to be here.

It's a gift that is with you permanently. But I don't know that anyone would possess a gift of miracles like a gift of teaching, where you could simply, at will, you can exercise that gift. I personally, to tell you the truth, I don't believe that there is anybody who possesses a gift of miracles.

But I believe that miracles can be wrought through any one of God's people at any given time when the Spirit would choose to do it. This causes me to have great suspicion over those ministries that present themselves as a miracle ministry. You know, come down and experience your miracle.

Because Brother So-and-So's got the power and the miracles are going to flow tonight. You know, a lot of the time, it's bogus. It's not happening.

But any one of us who are filled with the Spirit of God could potentially be that vessel through whom the Spirit would work to bring a miracle to pass. But God is sovereign in this area and He ministers miraculously as He chooses. We have gifts of healings.

And again, I don't know that there's anybody that would possess a permanent gift of healing. I'm sure there's not anybody. If there was, where are they? Let's get them down to the hospital.

Let's get them walking through the wards and pulling people out of their beds. It doesn't work that way, but here's how it does work. God, through His people, through any one of us at any given time, could be an

instrument through which a healing would come.

Or we could be the recipient of a healing from someone else. So there's gifts of healing. Then, swinging over to something real practical, there's the gifts of helps.

We talked about this last Sunday a little bit, gifts of helps. What are gifts of helps? It's just helping. Some people are just really gifted by God, truly, to help.

Now, you might say, well, I'm glad I don't have that gift. I don't want to help. Well, you just have to do it anyway without the gift.

You have to pray. I'm joking. But, you know, there are people that that is a specific gift.

And there's another term used in the list of the gifts that I think is a synonym for the gift of helps. It's the gift of ministries. In Romans 12 and in 1 Peter 4, two other places where the gifts are listed, ministries is listed.

I believe that's synonymous with helps. Ministries means serving. That's the word.

The word minister means a servant. It just means that you are gifted by God just with this gift to serve. And, you know, it's a beautiful gift.

When you see somebody come along and they just serve. They just step up. They're not looking for a pat on the back.

They don't want anybody to blow a trumpet to let everybody know what they're doing. They're just sort of there. They don't even care to be seen.

They just, can I help with this? But it's not just helping. You see, that's the thing. This is a spiritual gift.

God's actually empowering, enabling, and they really do help. When they're done, the job is finished and it's done well. It's that gift of the Spirit.

And then there's administration. And I think synonymous to administration would be the gift of leading. Administration is stated in 1 Corinthians 12.

Leading is stated in Romans 12. I think they're the same, I think it's the same gift to lead. Administration, you know, I used to sort of look down on the gift of administration because I didn't really, I didn't quite understand what it was.

And I remember one time specifically telling God, I don't want to do that gift of administration thing. And the Lord showed me, well, it's because you don't understand what it is. You have the wrong idea.

And, you know, I'll tell you honestly, what was happening at the time, I was living in London and I was, you know, not only pastoring the church there, but we had a ton of evangelism going and we were out on the streets and, you know, just great things were happening. And at that time in our ministry, I sensed the Lord was calling me back here. And the thing he was calling me back here to do was to assist Pastor Chuck, primarily in an administrative role.

And I sensed that. And I remember one day I was out, we were doing evangelism, and I said to the Lord, I said, Lord, there is no way I want to trade this for a desk job. I just don't want to do it.

Man, this is the most exciting thing in the world. And in my mind, administration was a desk job. I'm going to go back and sit down, you know, and get out the ledger, and I'm going to go, you know, get the schedule out and put it all together.

And the Lord spoke to me and gave me a great understanding of administration. He showed me that, Brian, it's not administration like you're thinking. Administration is the ability by my spirit to recognize my hand on the lives of people and to move people into positions of service so the work of God can take place.

And, you know, once I understood administration like that, it sounded a lot more pleasant to me. I thought, okay, well, I can do that. But that's what administration is, just having a vision from the Lord of how a ministry is to go and what gifts need to be, you know, put in here, and who are those people that God has gifted.

And then, of course, leading that would be, I think, the same thing. You're leading people. This is the direction we're going.

This is what God's doing. Now, exhortation is another gift that's mentioned. You know, some people have a gift of exhortation.

And the word exhortation, I think we can easily or more easily understand it if we think of it as encouragement. That's what exhortation really is. It's that gift of God to encourage God's people.

You're just an encouragement. Every time you share with them, they get encouraged. They get excited.

Yeah, man, I'm exhorted. I want to serve God. I want to be involved in the work of the spirit, those kinds of things.

There's a gift of mercy, a supernatural gift of mercy. People that are gifted by God to come and bring mercy into a situation. Now, all Christians are to show mercy, but there's a difference between showing mercy and having a gift of mercy.

And this is a gift that some in the body have. There's also the word of wisdom. The word of wisdom, a supernatural gift, wisdom given in a situation.

You know, I like to define the gift of wisdom as the perfect solution to the, you know, the unanswerable problem. You've got a problem. You cannot figure out how to deal with this problem.

It's just beyond you. You're just at a loss. There's, I just don't know what to do.

And then a word of wisdom comes, and it's the perfect answer. It's just, you couldn't have come up with a better answer. It's the ultimate answer to the dilemma.

That's a word of wisdom. God gives a word of wisdom. Then there's a word of knowledge.

And the word of knowledge is God bringing knowledge into a situation. Sometimes a word of knowledge will work for us personally. We might be reading the scriptures, and suddenly God will give us knowledge of something that we previously didn't know.

I've experienced the word of knowledge in teaching before. Not, you know, looking at a text and even meditating on it and still not quite understanding it. And in the course of the message, the Lord gives me the understanding.

It's a word of knowledge. A word of knowledge can manifest itself as I would come to somebody and say, you know, the Lord has just been showing me this about you. And I share that, and the person says, I can't believe it.

How could you know that? Well, it's a word of knowledge. God gives supernatural knowledge. It's a knowledge about things that you would not know otherwise.

So there's the word of knowledge. Then there's the gift of faith. The gift of faith is not the same faith that saves us, because the gift of faith is mentioned in the context of the gifts of the Spirit for believers.

The gift of faith is special faith, extraordinary faith, faith for the moment, faith to believe God in a particular situation that's unique and extraordinary and that is not something that you would have on a regular basis. A great example of the gift of faith back in the Old Testament, I think, is in the story of Jonathan, the son of Saul, where one morning he wakes up and he has this thought in his mind, God doesn't need the whole army to conquer these Philistines. He can use just a couple of us.

So he steps out in faith, and he brings a great victory to Israel. I think there was probably a gift of faith that was operating when Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer. And remember, there was that lame man that was seated there, and he was asking for alms.

And Peter said, silver and gold. We don't have any of that. But what we do have, we give you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Rise up and walk. And Peter reached out and grabbed him by the hand and pulled him to his feet. Peter probably did all of that before he ever even thought about it.

And afterward, he probably thought, wow, I'm glad it worked. Man. Because it was faith.

Faith just, God just gave faith. It was a supernatural thing. Now, Peter didn't go around wherever he went just grabbing people, pulling them up and healing them and doing things like that.

Jonathan didn't come back to Saul and say, Dad, send the army home. We don't need them anymore. I'll take care of the Philistines myself.

You saw what I did today. It's faith for the moment. It's extraordinary faith for the occasion.

And then there's prophecy, the beautiful gift of prophecy, where God will use you to speak a word to somebody else that's a word that's right from him. Prophecy occurs frequently in teaching, especially when the teacher is a person who's open to the gifts of the Spirit. But it's, you know, what prophecy is, it's that word that comes to you when you're sitting there and you feel like you're the only person in the building.

You feel like this message was handcrafted just for you. And guess what? It was. Because it's the Spirit of God bringing it to you.

It's a prophetic word. That can happen just through, you know, an individual speaking with you. An individual sometimes can say, you know, God's put a scripture on my heart for you.

They share it with you. Boom! It's like a lightning bolt. Man, that's the word of the Lord to me.

That's a prophetic word that comes. And then there's the discerning of spirits. The discerning of spirits is, I believe, the ability to detect the activity of the devil.

To recognize when the devil's got his hand in something. You know, the devil is very subtle. And it's not always that easy to discern his activity.

Sometimes something can appear to be, oh, just fine. But then there's something about it. You think, you know, I don't know.

There's just something that isn't quite right here. That's a discernment. And then later God brings more understanding.

And you realize, man, the enemy was at work here. And then there is the varieties of tongues. The varieties of tongues.

You know, tongues has gotten a bad, bad rap through excesses among the charismatic groups and the hyper-Pentecostal groups. And a lot of times when all you have to do is mention the word tongues and people, they just get a shiver in their spine. You know, don't do anything like that here, man.

But, you know, tongues is a gift of the Spirit. But notice, it's a variety of tongues. The tongues that we most often, I think about, are the tongues that are really like a prayer language.

The tongues by which we would praise God and worship God. A personal gift that would be given to us individually as Christians, to some of us. And that we would exercise that in the course of a prayer time.

That is tongues. There is a tongue, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, there are those who pray in a tongue. So it's a prayer language.

But it's a variety of tongues. I believe that this, of course, could refer to God gifting somebody to speak a language. A known language, a foreign language that they don't know themselves.

That's certainly what happened on the day of Pentecost, isn't it? What happened to those men that were in the upper room, they were filled with the Spirit. They came out and they were proclaiming the wonderful works of God in the languages of all of the nations that were gathered there. And the people were marveling.

They said, are not these all Galileans? How is it that we hear each one of them speaking in our own language the wonderful works of God? Jonathan Goforth, who was another great missionary into China, he desperately wanted to learn the Chinese language. To be able to preach to the people in Chinese. And he studied diligently.

But he just did not have an aptitude for it. He just wasn't getting it. And his friend who worked with him, who came into the country later, he just seemed to pick it up.

It was nothing for his friend. But he worked so hard. But he could not get it.

He was so discouraged. And he prayed one night and just said, oh, God, help me. Lord, you have to help me.

You have to do something. And he went to speak on a particular night. And where he normally stammered and stuttered and the Chinese people didn't really understand what he would say, they would actually say, no, please, you don't speak.

Let the other person speak. They couldn't understand him. And he got up one night.

And he spoke in the most fluent, beautiful Chinese. And it was with him the rest of his life. He found out two and a half months later, through a letter that was sent, that that very night, back at home in Canada, a group of young Bible college students were praying for him specifically that God would gift him with the language.

Varieties of tongues. I think there's something to it with the ability to learn a language for the glory of God in order to share the word of God. And then there is the interpretation of tongues.

And this, of course, would be in reference to those tongues that are unknown, dialects that have passed out of use, or even perhaps there are tongues of angels, because Paul, in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, he makes a reference to the tongues of men and of angels. There are tongues that would not be understood. And even if you were speaking a foreign language, if nobody knew the foreign language, there would be the need of an interpretation.

So, you know, it wasn't really my intention to go into an in-depth thing on the gifts tonight, because that's not my primary point. My primary point is this. Listen to what it says.

Paul said, the gift that is in you, he said, was given to you by prophecy. It was given by prophecy. And as I said initially, you see, the early church, there was a huge mark of the supernatural on the early church.

Prophecy. God spoke through prophetic words. Barnabas and Paul, you remember, they were in Antioch, and they were ministering to the Lord, and the Holy Spirit spoke and said, separate to me these two men for the work that I have called them to.

How did the Holy Spirit speak? Were they in a group, maybe praying, and suddenly a voice said, separate to me Barnabas and Saul? I don't think it happened that way. I think somebody in the group probably said, the Lord is calling Barnabas and Saul. The Lord wants them to be separated.

There was a prophetic word that was given. Paul says to Timothy, Timothy, the gifts that are in you, they were given by prophecy. Somebody said to Timothy, God has his hand on your life.

God is calling you. God has a work for you to do. Paul later would say to Timothy, stir up the gift that's in you through the laying on of my hands.

Paul laid his hands on Timothy. And in doing so, the gifts were imparted to him. You see, Christianity is, by God's design, supernatural.

You know, we're in the world today. The world is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity. We've got all of these fanciful arguments that the world gives, you know, against the faith.

And we've got the theory of evolution that is pretty much, you know, if you question that, you're seen as just an absolute numbskull. And we've got all of these different ideas and, you know, philosophies and things that are floating around. And what is the church to do? And, you know, Christians were scrambling around.

Okay, I've got to learn this philosophy, and I've got to learn how to refute postmodernism, and I've got to get all my information correct so I can defeat this argument here and there and everywhere. And, you know, we need to study to show ourselves approved. We need to be able to give every man an answer and that sort of thing.

But you know what? We need more than that. We need more than that. And the Christian faith was never designed to operate on a purely apologetic sort of a level, on a purely academic level.

The Christian faith was always infused with supernatural power. And that's the thing that silenced everything else. You want to know that Christ is risen from the dead? Okay, we'll show you.

This dead guy over here? Get up in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And he rises from the dead. Oh, you don't need to, you know, you don't need to build a whole apologetical argument there, do you? You just raise the guy from the dead, and that pretty much settles it.

Jesus Christ must be alive. And those are the kinds of things that they were doing. But you see, here's what's happened.

Tragically, many evangelicals today have reduced Christianity to a series of theological propositions and list of do's and don'ts. For many people, that's all Christianity is. It's just a series of theological propositions.

Now, there are theological propositions in Christianity, yes. There's doctrine, and it's important. And we know it's important.

We study it. It's what we're doing tonight. It's what we're doing all the time around here.

But if this is all I think of as Christianity, just filling my brain with information about God, theological propositions, I'm missing a whole other dimension that God intends for me to experience. That's the dimension of the supernatural. That's the experiential element.

Christianity is to be experienced by people. It's an experience. It's an encounter with God.

So when I come to the antagonist, when I come to the person that's hostile to the gospel, I don't merely want to refute him with my argument. I want him to experience the power of God. That there's a power here that's not human, that's different, that's beyond.

That's what biblical Christianity is. And so it was through prophecy, it was through the laying on of hands, that God was doing this great work back then, and it's going to be through the same things today. If the Christian church is going to rise up and have any great success in impacting the culture and turning people away from sin, we're going to have to do it by the power of God.

We're going to have to do it because we can approach somebody by the Spirit and say, you know, the Lord told me this about you. And you tell them what's going on in their heart that nobody else knows. See, that's a gift of the Spirit.

If people are going to be encouraged in their faith, we come alongside and we can prophesy over them and things of that nature. That's what the Christian faith looks like. It's the supernatural element.

You know, how is it that Islam is so, you know, sweeping the world like it is? And all of these other isms, they're out there in all of this energy. You know what? They're energized by the devil. It's a satanic energizing that's going on there.

So they've got the devil energizing them. And the unfortunate thing is the Christian church is sitting back going, well, you know, God doesn't work that way anymore. He doesn't energize people today.

You know, He's left us to our seminaries and to our intellect and so forth. And, boy, what are we going to do about these other religions that are rolling over us? You know, it was the sad, sad day in the church's history when somebody came up with the idea that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in power, the sign gifts, prophecy, words of wisdom, knowledge, healing, that those things ended with the death of the last apostle. That's the day the church came under a curse.

Man, if you believe that, if you believe that God doesn't speak to people apart from, you've got to find it, you know, chapter and verse, and God can't speak to you any other way. He can't speak to your heart. He can't bring somebody to you with a prophetic word or something like that.

You are going to miss out on so much of what God has and longs to do. It's a supernatural thing that we are involved in. The laying on of hands, Paul said, that's how it happened.

Timothy, it was through the laying on of hands. You know, I was thinking about this tonight. And I remember it was in my own life, my own experience.

It was through the laying on of hands. Somebody laid hands on me one night. We were in a little group praying in my apartment in Huntington Beach.

And this guy lays hands on me, and he says, Lord, I pray that you get Brian fired from his job, and I pray that you get him into full-time ministry in Jesus' name. And I thought, what is this nut talking about? I've got a good job. I don't want to get fired from my job.

And I really thought, this is ludicrous. But you know what? I did want to be in the ministry. I was longing, you know, I was trying to come up with some way that I could support myself and be free to just do the ministry.

God had given me sort of an evangelistic ministry. I was sharing the Lord with a lot of the people that I'd grown up with and all this. So I was so excited and wanted to really serve God in that full-time sense, but I never thought to ask to get fired from my job.

I mean, that was ridiculous. And I'll tell you, like I said, I just sort of blew that off because I had a great relationship with my boss. I had a good job.

I was completely secure in my situation. I went into work the next day, and my boss said, Brian, I've got some bad news for you. I said, what? He said, I have to lay you off.

You have to lay me off? What do you mean? Well, some things have gone on with the company. I haven't really told you what's been going on, but I've got to sell the company. We're not making it, and they're going to keep me on, but the rest of you guys have to go.

And I said, man, that's great. He said, what? What do you mean it's great? I said, well, let me tell you what happened last night. I told him this guy prayed for me.

He thought, oh, that's nuts. You know, he didn't believe any of that. But, you know, it happened.

And I look back on that, and I think, wow, amazing. And God uses these kinds of things. As we lay hands on each other, as we pray for each other, as, you know, the supernatural, that's the point.

So what does Paul say to Timothy here? He says, Timothy, do not neglect the gift. You know, the church today, I think, needs to really repent. That's the word, honestly, of neglecting the gifts of the Spirit.

Of, you know, just sort of, let's just push that off into a little corner somewhere. And, you know, man, this is what the church is built on. This is what it's all about.

We're not to neglect it. As a body of people, we're not to neglect it. We're not to neglect the gifts that God has given us individually.

Again, Paul would say to Timothy later, he would say, Timothy, stir up the gift that is in you. Because, you know, it's sort of a human tendency to neglect these things. It's a human tendency to sort of let the fire die down a bit.

But Paul said, stir up the gift. Literally, it means to fan it to full flame. Don't neglect the gifts that are in you.

And we as a church, we are not to neglect the gifts. We're to remember that this is a vital part of what God's doing in our lives as believers. And as Paul would say, he says, covet earnestly the best gifts.

That's the attitude that we're to have. Are we as God's people, are you tonight, am I tonight, am I saying, Lord, I want the gifts of the Spirit. Lord, would you give me the gifts of the Spirit, whichever gifts, anything that you want.

Because God's sovereign and He knows what's best. He knows what He has for you. But what He says to us is, desire earnestly.

Covet those things. Lord, I want that. I want to prophesy.

Lord, I want that gift. I want to be an evangelist. I want to share your gospel with people.

Lord, I want that gift of teaching so I can build others up. Oh, Lord, just whatever gifts you have. That's what we're to do.

And for those that have the gifts, don't neglect them. How do you neglect your gifts? By not using them. You know, I know lots of people in this church who are gifted by God, but they're not using their gifts.

I know they're gifted because 15 years ago, I remember them using their gifts. I remember they were teaching studies and they were doing things, and now they're just sort of, well, you know, I don't know, don't do that anymore. I got real busy at work and this kind of stuff.

No, we've got to stir those things up. Because the more you use them, the more you exercise them, the stronger we become in them, the more proficient we become. And ultimately, of course, the more effective we become.

And so let's remember this as we close tonight. Remember that we're serving the living God who's the same yesterday, today, and forever, and he has given gifts to his church, and he has not withdrawn them. That is bogus.

That's a lie. He has not withdrawn those gifts, and we need them today as bad as anybody's ever needed them in any generation in the past. We need them today because we have a great foe in the devil.

And he has marshaled a ton of forces against the church, and, you know, my arguments are not adequate. My intellect is not sufficient to fight against that. My human ingenuity and energy and my ability to, you know, make a real friendly environment and all of that, that doesn't beat back the devil.

The only thing that does is the power of the Spirit of God. And that's what God's given us. And that is that huge distinction between the Christian faith and every other religion in the world.

We ought to be advancing the kingdom of God because we have the power of Christ. But if we're not leaning on the power of Christ, if we're not realizing the power of Christ is there, if we're not asking to be filled with the Spirit and given the gifts, then is it any wonder why we're not moving? But the gifts of the Spirit are there. They're there for the asking.

And so tonight, I would encourage you to ask the Lord. Keep on asking. Keep on seeking.

Keep on knocking. And He will give. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we are serving the living God. And we thank You, Lord, that the gifts of the Spirit, that they're available to us tonight. Lord, they're gifts that You've given for the duration of the church age.

As long as we're here on earth, You promised, Lord, that the Spirit of God would be with us working in power. And so, Lord, tonight we ask that You would work in power among us. Pour out Your Spirit upon us, Lord, in a fresh way.

Oh, Lord, impart to us the gifts. And I pray, Lord, for those who need to stir up the gifts that are in them. They need to get back involved in the things that they might have been doing in the past.

Oh, Lord, help them to take that step of faith. Not to neglect the gift any longer, but to step out and to use it. And, Lord, for those that might not even know at this point what those gifts are, Lord, just begin to manifest those gifts in their lives.

And while we're praying tonight, if you're not sure what your gifts are, you're saying, you know, Brian, that sounds great, but I don't even know. And you want to know. You want to experience that power of the Spirit and those gifts of the Spirit.

If that's you tonight, why don't you just lift up your hand so I can see you, because I want to pray for you. That's great. Father, thank You for these and this desire.

And their request, as their hand is extended, Lord, is just a request to You, Lord, to fill them afresh with Your Spirit and to impart to them those gifts. And, Lord, I pray that in the week to come that they would begin to see manifestations of those gifts at work in their lives. And, Lord, for those, again, that maybe have allowed things to go dormant, help them, Lord.

If that's you tonight, if you can look back and say, yeah, the Lord gifted me in this area and He was using me, but that's all kind of in the past. But you want to see that gift stirred up again tonight in your heart. Flip your hand up.

I want to pray for you. Father, thank You, Lord. And now lead these men and women, Lord, into those places where they might use the gifts, stirring them up and fanning them to full flame.

Lord, thank You. Thank You, Lord, for the gifts. And put in our hearts that desire, that earnest desire for the best gifts.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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