

YOUR PART ON GOD'S TEAM

1 PETER 4:10-11

There are nearly half a dozen Portland radio stations that are devoted exclusively to sports, twenty-four/seven. While some of these stations broadcast live sporting events, like Ducks and Beavers' games, or Blazers' and Mariners' games, they are predominately sports *talk* stations. That means the hosts invite listeners to call in and give their analysis and opinions about what's going on in the world of sports.

Listeners frequently call in and play the role of the General Manager or the coach of their favorite team. A General Manager is responsible for putting the team together. And so listeners might say something like, "If I was the General Manager I would trade so and so for so and so. Or I would be willing to swap these *three* players on our team for that *one* player on their team. Because we just don't have any pitching...or we need a left guard that can protect our quarterback...or we can't possibly contend with the defense we've got. If I was the coach I would shift so and so to that position, and I'd be starting this guy instead of that guy, because that guy just isn't getting the job done."

Arguably the most exciting day on sports talk radio is draft day. You get serious fans calling in who have done their homework. They know the size, strength, speed, and stats of every player on the draft board, and they are convinced they know just exactly which ones will shore up the team's weaknesses, which ones will make the greatest impact, and which ones will contribute to the goal of winning the championship.

And *that* is the goal. It's all about winning. And they know the way to win is to have a team where all the positions are filled with solid, productive players. Where each player can complement and balance the strengths and weaknesses of the other players.

But of course, all this talk is just *talk*. These fabulous fantasy teams assembled on the air are just figments of the callers' imaginations—for two obvious reasons. One, these callers are not the real General Managers and coaches, and, therefore, have no power to make any decisions. And two, it takes a *lot* of money to lure and secure the top players.

Jesus Christ is the Owner and General Manager of countless teams that He has assembled all over the world. They are called local churches. And each of these teams has a specific task in the communities in which they are located. They are going up against cultures that are comprised of spiritually resistant people, some of whom are antagonistic to the gospel. They are going up against the sins that have saturated those communities and produced a number of spiritual maladies—including blindness and deafness and paralysis and amnesia and a host of other ills. They are going up against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms that control and influence many of the people living in those communities.

So the task of these teams is challenging.

And yet Jesus Christ is a brilliant General Manager. He said, "*I will put together my teams (I will build my church) and the gates of hell will not prevail against it*" (Matt. 16:18). He has put together teams in countless communities that are comprised of players, each of whom has some skill or talent or ability that perfectly complements and balances the other players on the team, so that when they work together in the way He has designed they do so in a manner that is perfectly suited to advance against the opposition and score points for His kingdom.

And because Jesus is also the Owner of the teams—an Owner with unlimited resources—He has ensured that every team has exactly what it needs to be successful. He is a generous Owner with deep pockets, and He has spared no expense.

And what is, perhaps, the most amazing thing of all is that not only is he in charge of player recruitment, he is also in charge of player development. In other words, he takes individuals, many of whom have no experience, no training, no skills, and very often no clue, and he infuses into them whatever talent or ability he sees fit that will enable them to make a vital contribution to the team and make victory possible.

This is no fantasy. This is reality. It's true of every local church that has been established by Jesus Christ, and it's true of Emmanuel Bible Church. We are not a random, coincidental collection of Christians. We have been sovereignly and strategically put together by Jesus Himself for the purpose of building one another up and blessing our community and advancing the kingdom of Christ. And there is a role for every one of us. A *significant* role.

If this is your church home, God has chosen you, given you an assignment, and given you a function in this church. He has given you a talent or ability or skill that is intended to contribute, in some important way, to the overall effectiveness of this church.

Those talents or abilities are called spiritual gifts, and we are going to be studying a passage this morning that tells us what they are, what they are for, and how to use them.

Verses 10-11. *¹⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen*" (NIV).

Before we explore the details in these verses let me remind you of the context of which they are a part. Peter has been talking about who we have become, what we are capable of doing, and what God wants us to do as a result of being born again. God, in His great mercy, has saved us. He has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, forgiven our sins, changed our hearts, indwelt us by His Spirit, and given us capabilities that are beyond the realm of human possibility.

Namely, we have the ability to act on behalf of Jesus, to express Jesus' words and to do Jesus' will in this world. In fact, Peter says this is not only possible, it is expected. This is our calling. We are "little Christs" in this world. We are His hands and feet and mouth and heart.

And as Peter gives some final instructions in chapter 4 He stresses that there is a sense of urgency about this because, **verse 7**, "*the end of all things is near.*" Jesus is coming back soon, so this is no time to be sitting on our hands, or to be distracted by inconsequential endeavors. We ought to be seriously serving Christ.

And that brings us to the premise Peter is making in verse 10. It is simply this: If God has given us gifts then it's obvious that something needs to be done, and that God expects *us* to do it. He didn't save us to merely bide our time until Jesus comes. He didn't leave us on this earth to merely sit in a church pew and sing songs and listen to sermons. He saved us to continue the work that Christ started. And He has enabled us and equipped us to do it effectively. Verse 10 gives us some of the details. **Verse 10** *¹⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

What is a gift? The most comprehensive instruction in the New Testament about spiritual gifts is written by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. The main thrust of that passage is that gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit given for the common good—the good of the people in the church and the community in which it is located. Gifts are also sovereignly distributed by the Holy Spirit. Who gets what gift is solely *His* determination, given solely at *His* discretion.

Therefore, getting back to 1 Peter, a gift is an ability, talent or skill that has its origins in the Holy Spirit and is given by Him to followers of Jesus so they can do things that He wants done. Not that *I* want done, or you or someone else wants done. But that *He* wants done. It is an ability to function or serve in a capacity that is both necessary and beneficial to the church or the community where the church exists.

Please note five principles about spiritual gifts from verse 10. First, they are **gifts**. They are not something you earn, not something you choose, and not something you generate. They originate from the Holy Spirit and are given freely by the Holy Spirit in accordance with His good pleasure and will.

Secondly, they are *supernatural*, as opposed to natural. If these gifts are imparted by the Holy Spirit who lives in us, it means that they transcend our natural ability. They surpass personality and genetics and IQ. They are *divine* abilities that enable us to do things we otherwise could not do.

Now the Holy Spirit may work in accordance *with* our natural abilities. After all, He created us and He gave us those abilities, and He may choose to enrich or fortify or empower the abilities and talents you already have. But the end result of what you are able to do with your *Spirit-given* gifts are *supernatural*.

Third, every believer has at least one spiritual gift. Look at the first word of **verse 10**, “**Each one should use...**” There is no such thing as a gift-less Christian. That’s because there’s no such thing as inactive status on God’s team. He drafted you and equipped and empowered you to make a contribution. You are a vital part of the team and God has enabled you to function in a manner that will contribute to the overall health and effectiveness of the church.

Fourth, our spiritual gifts are for the benefit of others. Look at the middle of **verse 10**.¹⁰ *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...* I am not the beneficiary of my spiritual gift. God didn’t give it so I could feel good about myself or so that I could gain recognition or status in the church.

This was precisely the error that the church at Corinth made in the first century. They had discovered their gifts, to be sure, and they saw how wonderful and powerful those gifts were. But a lot of them were using their gifts to gain leverage in the church—to make themselves look good, to elevate their spiritual status, or gain personal power. And it was selfish and counter-productive.

That’s because God gave us our gifts to bless others—to build them, encourage them, contribute to their spiritual growth, and meet their needs.

And then fifth, spiritual gifts are a matter of stewardship. **Verse 10b**. “...*faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms*.”

The word Peter uses here has reference to the work of a particular kind of slave in the ancient world called a steward. Today, we might call him a superintendent, like Joseph was in Potiphar’s house. This person was entrusted with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the home, distributing the master’s wealth—paying the bills, buying the food, investing the money, collecting the debts. And the master’s household either prospered or faltered on the basis of the steward’s work.

Every believer in Christ is God’s steward. He has entrusted each of us with the administration of *His* wealth, namely His grace, which is the world’s most precious commodity. And He has equipped us in such a way that through our attitudes and words and actions we are able to dispense that grace to others.

By the way, the *one* thing people need most is the grace of God. And so the primary incentive to using our spiritual gifts is knowing that the people who benefit from them are encountering God's grace through us. On the other hand, if I don't use my gifts then people might *not* get to encounter God's grace. They might miss out on something essential for their spiritual health and well-being.

Now, you may be saying, "Okay. I get it. But I'm not sure what my gifts are. I've read the passages in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 that identify the various gifts, but I'm not sure which ones I've got. I've never taken one of those spiritual gift inventories to be able to determine what it is."

I believe we can make this matter more complicated than it really is. I've seen two things happen. One, a person is indefinitely sidelined in his service because, ironically, he's not sure in what capacity he's "supposed" to serve. And two, a person, after discovering his gift, ignores existing needs within the church because those needs don't correspond to his gift.

I'm convinced that God provides spiritual gifts in direct relation to the specific needs of a church. So if you're not sure what your gift is, my advice is to, first of all, ask God to reveal it to you. He's not trying to hide it from you. If He has given it to you, you can be sure that He wants you to use it.

Second, as we contemplate the needs of the church, we should prayerfully consider whether God would have us respond to any of those needs. In other words, instead of trying to identify the name of your gift, try serving in a particular capacity for awhile. And after you have served for awhile ask yourself and others, "Am I blessing others? Is God working through me in this capacity? Are people experiencing God's grace through my service?"

The answers to those questions are more obvious than you might think. And if you can answer those questions affirmatively, you may have identified your gift. The point is, it's not so important that you are able to name the gift, but that you are actually serving others in some way. Rather than sitting on the sidelines and watching what is going on, we need to get into the game and let God score some points through us.

And it is most definitely *Him* working through us. Look at **verse 11a**. ¹¹ *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.*

I believe this is a reference to more than just preaching the Gospel or teaching the Word of God. It's a reference to any time we open our mouths to minister to others, whether it be encouraging, admonishing, giving counsel, sharing the gospel one on one, or some other means or method of communicating truth. Whenever we minister with our mouths we need to speak as ones speaking the very words of God.

Not our own words. Not our own opinions or our own insights or our own ideas, no matter how clever or intelligent they might be. Our words have no power to effect real and lasting change in a person's life. But God's words do. That's why Paul, in Ephesians 6, when asking the church to pray for him, said, "*Pray that whenever I open my mouth words may be given me so that I may fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel*" (6:19). Paul knew that if he opened his mouth to speak his own words nothing of eternal consequence would happen. He wanted to speak *God's* words.

For someone who makes his living by verbally communicating I am so convinced of this that I ask the Holy Spirit every single day, before I start my work, "Would you fill me and take control of my mind so that I can have your thoughts, be able to think your thoughts after you?" As I'm studying the Bible and trying to learn what the text is saying and how best I can teach it, I don't dare begin my study without an acknowledgment of my absolute dependence on Him for

insight and wisdom. And that He would give me His words to be able to communicate to you.

When I prepare to counsel someone about something I pray, “Spirit, would you give me wisdom so that I can have your thoughts and discern your will and speak your words?”

I’m so convinced that apart from Him I can do nothing that if I didn’t feel I had His words to say to you I would tell you to go home before the sermon started. What’s the point in staying? My insights are thoroughly inconsequential, from an eternal point of view.

But it’s not just when we speak. Look at **verse 11b**. *“If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides...”*

Once again, Peter is emphasizing that spiritual gifts are supposed to be exercised in dependence upon the Holy Spirit and in the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is a necessary divine component in the exercise of our gifts, without which the gift would be meaningless or powerless.

So even when we are serving by changing diapers in the nursery or making coffee in the kitchen, God wants us to do those things under the influence of the Spirit so that there is divine energy expended and divine grace dispensed when we serve. We should do it with the strength He provides.

Why? Because the things God wants to accomplish through us when we use our gifts are eternally consequential things. Any time God’s grace is dispensed it makes an eternal impact, whether it is apparent to us or not.

So what does this mean for us? It means that we must stay connected to the Lord. We must rely on Him for strength and ask Him for wisdom. We must let Him be in control, and have His way.

And if He is in control and has His way grace *will* be imparted through us to others. Something eternally significant will occur. People will be blessed. And God will be honored.

And let’s not forget that. It’s all about Him, and all for Him. Look at the end of **verse 11**, *“...so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.”*

The other night, when the Houston Astros won the World Series, the commissioner of baseball awarded the trophy to the owner, Jim Crane. Frankly, I don’t think many of the viewers cared about seeing Mr. Crane. That was just a formality. Let’s hurry up and get that over with so we can hear from the players and the coaches—the ones who had the skill and the talent and the heart to win the trophy. Because we know, the only real credit Jim Crane can take was that he had enough money to buy the team, and that he picked the right General Manager and coach who would, in turn, assemble the best players in the world on one team.

But it’s not the same with God’s teams. He’s a different kind of Owner. Yes, He has assembled wonderful teams. Yes, He has spared no expense in making those teams capable of winning every time. But the Lord is also the one who *gives* the talent and *infuses* the ability and *accomplishes* the results. The players are just vessels, conduits, instruments through which *He* works.

So there is only One person who deserves the praise and the glory, and that’s the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus gets the credit. Because Jesus is awesome. Jesus is wonderful. Jesus does all the work.

We are not a random, coincidental collection of Christians here at Emmanuel. We have been sovereignly and strategically placed together and put together by Jesus Himself for the purpose of impacting each other and this community with the Gospel and advancing the kingdom of Christ. And God has generously given Emmanuel Bible Church every gift we need

to make an eternally consequential impact. Each one of us are stewards of God's grace, and we get to dispense His grace when we use our spiritual gifts.

Let's use those gifts. People need the grace that God wants to offer them through us.

Your Part on God's Team 1 Peter 4:10-11

Main Idea: God has equipped and assigned each of us to make a significant and enduring contribution in each other's lives

Introduction: The perfect General Manager

Spiritual Gifts and Christ-likeness

Some Facts about Spiritual Gifts

They are gifts

They are supernatural

Every single believer has at least one

They are for the benefit of others

They are a matter of stewardship

Discovering Spiritual Gifts

Employing Spiritual Gifts

Confidence in the Lord

Reliance on the Lord

The Goal of Spiritual Gifts

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

1 Peter 4:10-11

Read the Passage in 1 Peter 4:7-11, emphasizing verses 10 and 11. You may also want to read the passages on spiritual gifts in Romans 12:1-8, and 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

Do you know what your spiritual gift is? If yes, how did you discover it, and how do you know for sure that it is God's gift for you? If no, how can you discover it?

What keeps God's people from using their spiritual gift? Are any of those things preventing you?

How can you tell when you are using your spiritual gift? How can you tell when you are functioning in an area which is *not* your spiritual gift?

How can you be sure that you are operating in God's strength and speaking God's words?

In what specific way can you serve someone else this week by using your spiritual gift?