

## Some Assembly Required

"Some assembly required" – what does this phrase stir in you? Children's toys comes first to my mind, followed by wondering if I have the right tools, then thoughts about instruction booklets. That phrase "some assembly required" alerts me that though everything will be provided, I've got some work to do, and some choices about how I will do it. Some assembly required tells me that the desired item is possible but may or may not become my reality.

To be and become the church, as well as a Christian, some assembly is required. This need to assemble carries with it the time and energy consuming aspects of putting together those toys we all want badly enough to purchase, even knowing that "some assembly is required." "Some assembly required" is a reflection of Paul's message in Philippians 3:12-14. We haven't "arrived". God is constantly and gracefully working in every aspect of our lives, both individually and together, as the many who are also one.

Spiritual gifts are the parts and tools which Scripture guarantees us God will provide for the ongoing assembly of Christ's church. They are as unique to the church as each of those recharging cords seem to be to each electronic item we own. They may be talents, such as musical, mechanical, interaction with others, or getting into trouble, yet all talents or the use of them are spiritual gifts. Confused yet, beginning to feel like you've wandered into an instruction booklet?

Though I have known many interesting people in my life, I have never met anyone who writes instructional booklet, they remain a mystery to me. I find that there is often a language gap between this mysterious writer and I, I know the letters and can even string them together into words, but the meaning as relates to the project I've embarked upon is anything but clear. When we speak of things of the spirit, that gap is a real and apparent aspect of the conversation, it is a benchmark that we have moved passed "us" and toward God. That "not quite clear" sensation reminds us that we are in the midst of being assembled – of being created and recreated in Christ's image.

Carrying that sensation with us, accepting that all the "instructions" may not make sense but followed step by step will lead us toward wholeness, let's look closer of spiritual gifts and what they mean to the Body of Christ. Every person is gifted by God. These God-given gifts are innate – inborn orientations that transcend skills or abilities. When we embrace and identify our God-given gifts, we understand that some things come "easy" to us, and that those "easy things" differ from person to person. This giftedness is more than what is achieved by hard work and education, though each and every gift can be developed and strengthened.

For most of us, a handful of gifts will be evident at any point in our lives. In different situations, at various phases of our lives, new gifts may emerge as others recede. All gifts are from God, and God's spirit blows where it wills – what is strong in us today, may become secondary tomorrow. What remains constant is that we are gifted by God to use our gifts for the common good.

It is in their use that gifts become Spiritual Gifts and when what is experienced or achieved becomes much more than what any of us could ever do on our own. When we speak of Spiritual gifts we move into "things characterized or controlled by the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are first of all controlled or characterized by the Spirit. Human giftedness becomes infused with God's spirit in the hearts, lives and actions of those who choose to turn from self to God. Spiritual gifts are those which are used for the building up, maintaining and functioning of the body of Christ.

These gifts should not be confused with the fruit of the Spirit. Gifts are services to be performed for others; "fruit" speaks of the graces or character traits of a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit of God takes up residence in a person, that person is not enabled to serve, but the signs of holiness are cultivated and grow, these signs are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23). Gifts differ, fruits do not. Both the fruit and the gifts are essential. Both are manifestations of the indwelling Spirit. But the two are not the same.

Our biblical passage tells us that Spiritual gifts are "manifestations." Be to manifested means to be made visible. What it is that is seen when our human gifts, talents and efforts are offered up for the work of Christ? The Holy Spirit - This is how the Holy Spirit is seen -- in the exercise of spiritual gifts. One of the greatest displays of the Holy Spirit is a church in which the members are exercising their gifts for one another. A church functioning as a gifted body is a beautiful display of the Spirit. So a spiritual gift is not only an ability to serve; it is the channel through which the Holy Spirit ministers to the body. When you exercise your gift in the service of others, it is to be recognized as the manifestation, the display of the Spirit of God.

This is when being many who are one become reality, when it is the Holy Spirit and not any individual who is elevated. When all are seen as parts and tools used by God and each is celebrated as being a part of God's ongoing work.

There are approximately 20 categories in which spiritual gifts fall, all 20 are needed and necessary for the church to be the church. Discovering and utilizing your gifts as needed and as a part of the greater whole is vital if the church is to be the living, breathing, serving, growing body of Christ. Some are easily apparent, both in ability and need, others are not so easily seen, yet are perhaps even more vital. During the next few months all will be offered opportunity and encouragement to take part in identifying, understanding and increasing the use of their God-given gifts as spiritual gifts. As we embark on this time of discovery I ask that each of you be open and willing, knowing that each will discover something new and changing along with affirmation. That this may be a time where your secondary or not yet developed gifts may be needed or you may be called to help cultivate the giftedness of another.

We'll not delve into the 20 this day, if you're eager to know, just give me a call. There are two I would lift up today: First is the gift of compassion. This gift moves people to action on behalf of those in need. Compassion when coupled with the Holy Spirit is not a simple caring about others, but such a radical caring that we have no choice but to make sacrifices for others.

Those with the gift of compassion rarely ask "Should I help," but instead focus on how to help. Compassion makes us fundamentally aware of the Christ in others and springs from our desire to care for all of God's creatures and creation. Our ministry of Helping Hands Helping Neighbors is a ministry of compassion and provides opportunity for all to be involved. Whether it is picking up a paintbrush or clearing tables at the annual fund raising dinner, please commit to supporting this ministry.

The other gift I would lift up and encourage us to seek out is the gift of exhortation, which is one of the most misunderstood gifts, one of the most overlooked and seldom cultivated gifts, and one of the most life bringing gifts. Exhortation is not preaching, it is not about standing up and shouting, it may not be about words at all.

The gift of exhortation is manifest in people who offer encouragement, wise counsel, unflagging support, and empowerment. Those who exhort stay focused on helping people maximize their own potential and live from their own gifts and skills. Exhorters help people feel good about themselves, build confidence, and not grow discouraged. Often, those with the gift of exhortation make others feel good just by being present.

It takes all of us, all we each have to offer, and the offering of all to God for Spiritual Gifts become authentic. It takes hard work, faith and God. I believe we have all that is needed, and ask that we consider are we willing to accept that "some assembly is required"? Are we willing to tear open the boxes, lay each piece out carefully and walk through the instructions, step by step, loving action by loving action?