

THE GIFTS – BEING EQUIPPED TO LIVE AS A CHILD OF GOD

Living as an Offering

by Don James

Introduction

This talk is about discovering and utilizing the gifts God has given us. This talk is also about **attitude** and **perspective**, because *attitude precedes action*, and *perspective provides the reason for motivation*. If someone doesn't believe his house could be broken into – or he doesn't even think about it, he won't do what needs to be done to secure it until it is too late. But if he has the perspective and can see a robber approaching his home, he now has the proper motivation and attitude to secure his home. As a charismatic community, we often talk about the spiritual gifts, but for one reason or another, we often find ourselves lacking the proper attitude or perspective to effectively utilize these gifts.

As I prayed about this talk, I felt the Lord wanted me to lay a foundation for understanding the gifts, and that foundation has to do with our being children of God. If we don't understand that we are God's children, we will not act as God's children. Suppose you lived your life in a poor orphanage, and then a millionaire adopted you as his child. You might have all the gifts and riches the millionaire has already provided you with, but if you still have the mind set of being a poor orphan, you'll never use them. You might consider yourself unworthy, you might even feel uncomfortable in a different environment... it won't matter how much the millionaire does to show you he loves you and wants you to share his life, if you don't accept and receive the life he wants for you, you won't participate in it.

So I wanted to start this talk by first speaking about what a child of God is, and to do this, I want to look at the Trinity and what characterizes the Son of God.

The Nature of a Child of God

To be truly fulfilled in life, is to live according to our nature, to be the children God created us to be. As children of God, we are called to participate in the Divine Nature. What does this mean? Let's take a look at the Trinity.

The Trinity:

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identical in every way except in relation to each other. We say the Father begets the Son and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. I do not want to get into the Trinity in depth or talk about God's attributes. But I do want to use the Son to help illustrate what we are called to as children of God. There are two characteristics of the Son that I want us to focus on throughout this talk:

(a) The Son receives all that he is from the Father (his nature = the Father's nature)

The Father gives all that he is to the Son (his will, his thought, his judgments, his power, glory, mercy, holiness, his complete and perfect love, his selfless generosity ... everything).

"Everything that the Father has is mine..." (John 15:15)

(b) The Son offers all that he is to the Father (that is the nature he received, therefore that is what he does)

Because the Son receives all that the Father has, he is in complete union with the Father. There is no difference between his will and the Father's will, they are one and the same. This is the basis for all that the Son does – for he cannot act contrary to his nature, and so he is completely obedient to the Father in everything. He loves what the Father loves. He understands as the Father understands... He does what the Father does – and offers all that he is to the Father in love.

Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also. The Son can only do what he sees his Father doing... (John 5:19-20)

"I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me." (John 5:30)

The Perpetual Sacrifice of the Son

From all eternity, the Son has always offered all that he is in love to the Father, it is a perpetual offering or giving of himself to the Father. When he became man, this offering was manifested in space and time. And though there was never anything lacking in his offering from the point of view of obedience, it was not “complete” or “perfect” until he embraced everything the Father called him to, even death on the cross: *Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:8-9).* We’ve heard the saying that “it would have been enough... if he shed just one drop of his blood...” That may be true from our perspective, but from God’s point of view, to give a little would not be true to who he is. There will never be a time when he doesn’t give everything.

From our point of view, the cross is a sacrifice. We see the death and suffering in the cross. And we might equate that with the life God calls us to – that it won’t be a fun road! And we can shy away from the cross. But from God’s point of view, it demonstrated a life perfectly lived, because it was the complete and perfect offering of oneself in love and union with God. All that is of God was now freely received and freely embraced by man, through Jesus, the firstborn of a new creation.

This is what God wanted for man at creation – that man would eat from the tree of life (which is Christ) to receive the divine nature and from that nature live. This is what it means to be a child of God.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter: 1:3-4)

This is why the cross is so essential to us – not just to end sin, but it is to be our way of life, the way of love.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (Matt 16:24-25) Another way of putting this might be “whoever offers or gives away his life to me will find it” because that is the nature of a child of God – when we offer ourselves to God and embrace his will, we live in accordance with who we really are.

The *Eucharist* is the perfect expression of this perpetual offering of the Son to the Father and Jesus provided it to us so that we could participate in it. Rooted in Christ, and now one with his body, blood, soul, and divinity, we offer ourselves to the Father in Christ as he offers himself. Then joined to Christ, we go forth into the world to continue his mission and lay our lives down for the world’s conversion, even as Christ did for ours. We are called to participate in his mission (*“There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.” Matt 6:37).*

Our Attitude and Perspective

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, made in human likeness. being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil 2:5-8)

I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

My point in all of this is that if we truly want to discover and utilize the gifts God has given to us, it must be grounded in the attitude of making our lives an offering of love to the Father. We are his children, we have received his Spirit, his nature. If we truly want to participate in his life, we must do what is central to the life of God - which is to offer one’s life in love. This is not a passive thing, it requires action. Love is active. We will not grow or even discover our gifts without action. If we truly want to grow as children of God, our focus must be to do “*whatever he tells you to do*” (John 2:5). Our goal should be to honor God in all we do, so that others would see Him in us.

He must become greater; I must become less. (John 3:30)

If we can adopt this attitude and perspective, we will see God work tremendously in and through us. Therefore, **(a) find your life in God** (receive life from Him), and **(b) Offer your entire life to God.**

Gifts – God’s Equipment for Your Offering

So what does all this have to do with the gifts? ***The gifts God gives us are the equipment we need to serve God and his Church in the role and capacity he wants us to.*** Gifts are not restricted to the charismatic gifts - there are many gifts, some are natural, some are supernatural, but all are given to equip us to live our lives as God calls us to live.

God is a communion of persons and therefore, the life he calls us to participate in is a communion of persons - not just the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also everyone else who is in Christ. We are members of his body, which is both physical and spiritual - and therefore we receive both physical (natural) and spiritual gifts by which we can offer our lives. The gifts that God gives us are an indication of how he might want us to serve Him and the Church.

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13)

1. Everyone of us has received gifts

If you are a Christian, you are a part of the body of Christ and therefore have a role. If you don’t know what that role is or what gifts God has given you, you can discover them – but be assured, you have been given gifts. Every part of the body has a function, and you are no exception. And just as God gives the eye the ability to see, so he gives us the ability through his gifts to serve in the capacity he created us for.

2. The gifts are for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. 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. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

We are the stewards of the gifts God has given us and he expects us to use them (*Parable of the Talents: Matt 25:14-30*). If we do not use the gifts God has given us, the body suffers. Do not deny others the benefit of your gift!

3. There are many gifts

(a) **The Seven Sanctifying Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11)** – every Christian receives these. These are meant to help us follow the Holy Spirit and as we do so, the fruits of the Spirit grow within us. As we abide in these and allow them to grow in us, we will be able to more perfectly exercise whatever charismatic gifts God gives us. If we do not let these grow in us, we will not have the character or disposition to manifest Christ to the world.

“1830 The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

*1831 The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are **wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord**. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.” (CCC 1830-1831)*

(b) **The Charismatic Gifts** – these are gifts given to us to serve others, to enable us to be powerful channels of God’s love and redeeming presence in the world. They may seem extraordinary (*ie.* miracles, prophecy, healing, discernment of spirits) or ordinary (*ie.* Administration, service, hospitality, mercy). Through these gifts, God takes us beyond our nature to know and carry out his will in his authority and power.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1Cor 12:4-11)

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:3-8)

A list of gifts are which are used for the building up of the Church are:

Administration: Provides the planning and coordination needed to accomplish good things.

Celibacy: Most fulfilled and spiritually fruitful by remaining unmarried and celibate for the sake of others.

Craftsmanship: Inspired artistic or creative works that beautifies and/or orders the physical world.

Discernment of Spirits: Accurate perception of divine or demonic presence in certain people, places, or things.

Encouragement: Nurtures or fosters others through presence and words of comfort, encouragement, and counsel.

Evangelism: Share the faith in a way that draws others to become Jesus' disciples and responsible members of his Church.

Faith: Exceptional trust in the love, power, and provision of God and remarkable freedom to act on this trust.

Giving: Giving with exceptional generosity to those in need.

Healing: Grace to cure illness or

restore health.

Helps: Offering my talents and charisms to enable another person to serve God and people more effectively.

Hospitality: Warmly welcoming and caring for those in need of food, shelter, and friendship.

Intercessory Prayer: Prayer for others, enabling God's love and deliverance to reach them in specific ways.

Knowledge: Empowered study and intellectual activity resulting in new or clearer understanding of God, people, and the universe.

Leadership: Sharing a compelling vision with others that draws them to work together to make the vision a reality.

Mercy: Practical deeds of compassion that comfort those who suffer and help them experience God's love.

Missionary: Effectively and joyfully using your talents and charisms in a second culture.

Music: Writing or performing music for the delight of others and the

praise of God.

Pastoring: Building Christian community by nurturing the relationships and long-term spiritual growth of a group.

Prophecy: Communicating the word or call of God to individuals or groups through inspired words or actions.

Service: Seeing obstacles that keep good things from happening and doing whatever it takes to remove them.

Teaching: Enabling others to learn information and skills that help them reach their full spiritual and personal potential.

Voluntary Poverty: A lifestyle of cheerful, voluntary poverty or simplicity in order to identify with Jesus and the poor.

Wisdom: Insight that comes up with creative solutions to specific problems and enables others to make good decisions.

Writing: Using words to create works of truth or beauty that reflect human experience and bring glory to God.

(c) **YOU are a gift.** All that you are and all that you've received is a gift. You are not an accident. You were created because God loves you and wants you to enjoy the fullness of life that is found only in him. Your life, your talents, your ability to learn, think, choose, love, all that you are, is a gift from your Father. Sometimes, in a charismatic community, we can overlook the natural gifts which are just as much a gift as the supernatural. He's given you the natural gift of who you are and the supernatural gifts through the Holy Spirit to be his child, and to be our brother/sister. You are a gift to all of us. God has brought you here to bless us in the way you offer your life to God and his body, and so that we could bless you through our offering. You are the steward of the particular grace God has given you - but it won't benefit anyone unless you offer it to us.

(d) **GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE is a Gift.** Your *testimony* is a gift. Think of how many have been brought to the Lord through the witness of the Saints. When you see God work in and through you, share it – it is meant for the whole body.

4. Discovering your gifts

- (a) **The first step in discovering your gifts is to OFFER YOURSELF TO GOD.** The first gift to recognize is you. Your life, your heart, your mind, your will, your body, your soul, .. all that you are is the first gift God has given you. *Freely you have received, so freely give (Math 10:8).* Freely offering yourself to God is the environment that allows his life within you to grow. It allows the *fruits of the Spirit* to grow, and those fruits are what attracts others to the Lord.

Offer your life, your time, your thoughts, your talents, your body, your affection, his work in your life. You may not hear the Lord clearly or understand what he means as he leads you, that's okay. Just offer what you can to the Lord - this creates the disposition to hear the Lord more clearly.

Saint Francis of Assisi thought God wanted him to physically rebuild his church buildings, and so he set his mind to doing it, brick by brick. We know that God meant to rebuild his church by bringing people to a mature faith & devotion to Christ, yet God used his offering of time and effort to build a much deeper love and faith within St. Francis that would allow him to do the deeper work God planned for him. Likewise, God will use our efforts to deepen his life within us and give us greater clarity about his vision for our lives and the gifts he's given us to achieve that vision.

- (b) **Second, LET GOD SHOW YOU HOW HE SEES YOU.** We can be so critical of ourselves. Unless we have a huge ego, we tend to see our weaknesses rather than the talents and gifts that God has given us. We can think we have nothing to offer. This is no accident. Satan doesn't want us to offer ourselves to God, he wants us to feel incapable and unworthy of serving God and so he continually accuses us.

But you are a child of God! You are redeemed, forgiven and raised up! Your dignity has been restored! Are we still weak? Yes, but naturally we will always be weak (we cannot be children of God without God's grace). We can do nothing apart from God (*John 15: 1-8*), but in Christ, we can do all that he asks of us! It is important to recognize the ways that God works in us so that we can further trust in his grace rather than be discouraged and shrink back.

Think about Saint Paul. After Christ revealed himself to Paul, can you imagine the incredible sorrow he must have felt over persecuting the Church and handing Christians over to be murdered? Can you imagine how horrified he must have felt to have so strongly condemned Christ and the Church? If his view of himself stopped here, he probably never would have turned his life around. Yet he allowed God to show his mercy and his love. He allowed God to restore his dignity, to raise him from his state of sin to be a child of God.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Cor 15:9-10)

God wants you to see when he is at work in you, even in the things we might take for granted. Encouragement is a good example. This is a gift from the Lord – some people are very good encouragers, they've been given the ability to reach into someone's heart and to lift their spirit by the words they say and the affection they give. Yet this can seem like a natural part of their personality and so they may not realize it is from God – but it is! Could you imagine how hard life could be if there weren't any encouragers among us?

God has equipped you both naturally and supernaturally to be his child. He wants you to rejoice just as much in the natural gifts he has given you as the supernatural – neither makes you closer to the Lord, *what makes you closer to the Lord is your offering of these gifts to him and those around you.*

- (c) **Third, CONSIDER what he has shown you about yourself.**

- **What natural talents do you have?** God certainly is not restricted to using our natural talents, yet he also gave them to us for a reason. If you are very outgoing, the Lord may want to use you in the area of evangelism. If you are a good communicator, God may want you to preach or teach. If you are a good cook or caregiver, God may want you to show hospitality. If you have a talent for music, he may want you to be a music minister. **As you offer your natural talents to God, he will inspire you so they are transformed into vehicles of grace.** A great example is music - A musician could choose to play in a rock band, but he is letting God inspire him to help others worship God.
- **As you pray, what are your thoughts and desires?** Are you concerned about the world? God may be giving you a gift of intercession or evangelism. Are you concerned about the spiritual growth of others? God may be

giving you a gift of pastoring. Are you concerned that things go well during certain events or ministries? God may be giving you a gift of service or administration. Are you concerned about the direction of a group? God may be giving you a gift of leadership. Do you ever get a sense of what God might want to say to someone or to a group? God may be giving you a gift of prophecy, or words of knowledge, or words of wisdom. Are you concerned about the poor or downcast? God may be giving you a gift of mercy or encouragement.

Consider the things that come to your mind as you offer yourself to the Lord and God will help you to see the type of gifts He is giving you to serve as he calls you.

- **What have others identified in you?** Ask the brothers/sisters who know you best what they think your gifts are. Has anyone ever given you a prophetic word regarding your giftedness? Has anyone told you that they were blessed by a particular act that you did (service, music, sharing, intercession, etc.)? What others see in you can help to clarify your gifts and your role in the body.

(d) Step out and experiment – if you think you have some sense of the gift God has given you, pursue it. Do not be afraid but trust in God and act in love. *Everything is not riding on your getting it “right”, but your growth in the Lord is riding on your action.* So do not be afraid, if you offer yourself to the Lord, you will be a success and you will see fruit born, because *it is the offering of yourself that brings you closer to God.*

Conclusion & Summary

God loves you and he wants you to participate in his very life, to be his child! This involves (a) receiving everything he wants to give you, including his divine nature, and (b) living according to that nature (making our lives an offering - loving God and neighbor). God has a particular role for us in the body of Christ and equips us both naturally and supernaturally so that we would lack nothing in fulfilling that role. As we offer ourselves to God, examining our talents, thoughts and desires, we will grow in our knowledge and use of the gifts God has given us and bear fruit in the role he is leading us to.

Suggested Daily Routine for the next Month

Below are some suggested steps to help you grow in your experience as a child of God.

- When you get up, pray and offer yourself to the Father. If you're not used to praying to the Father, try to persevere in this because it can help you identify yourself as his child. Thank the Father for the life he has given you, and offer yourself to him. "Father, I thank you for creating me and making me your child. I offer to you all that I am: my heart, my thoughts, my desires, and my will. Please lead me today. In all that I think and in all that I do, help me to honor you. Help me to recognize when my thoughts stray from you and at those times, help me to bring myself back into a position of love and offering. Help me to love those around me: my family, my friends, my neighbors, my co-workers. I love you Father."
- Listen to the Holy Spirit. In your prayer and frequently during the day, consider what the Holy Spirit would have you do. You are his temple – consider what should be brought into your mind and what should not. Honor the work God is doing in you by keeping it pure and free of the things that can distract us so easily (TV, Internet, overly busy schedules, thoughts of anger, envy, lust, self-condemnation, etc.).
- Pick times in the day where you typically have a break (breakfast, lunch, dinner, driving to work, etc.) and examine your conscience. Repent for any thought or act that you've seen turn you from a position of offering and let the Holy Spirit have a chance to sweep his temple clean. Rejoice that the Lord loves you so much!
- In various situations through the day (talking with friends, coworkers, doing your job, taking care of your family, buying groceries, etc.) ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the gifts you can use to do what he wants you to do. Ask him to help you see things as he sees them (the love he has for those around you, their neediness for him, what you can do to be a blessing to them).

Other Resources: (these books are to be used together)

- "The Catholic Spiritual Gifts Inventory" by Sherry Weddell. (<http://www.siena.org>)
- "Discerning Charisms: A workbook for navigating the discernment process" by Eryn Huntington and Sherry Anne Weddell. (<http://www.siena.org>)