

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(October 17, 2021)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Everybody in the Game

(Serving Jesus Together)

Gifted to Serve with Impact

(1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Colossians 4:17)

Study #5

Introduction: Making the cut...

Some of you know what it feels like to try out for a team and to NOT make the cut. I know that feeling.

The little league baseball coach who cut me from a team I had tried out for when I was thirteen was kind - but he was also honest.

He told me that I didn't have the skillset necessary to make the team, but that if I worked hard over the next few months, I could possibly make the team next year.

It was a long walk home that day.

Maybe you've had that kind of a walk after baseball tryouts or for some other sports team. Or maybe it was for an academic competition or for a talent show. Maybe you had and then lost a job for the same sorts of reasons.

In some venture, you didn't make the cut.

And the message - even if was delivered kindly - was, *"You don't have what it takes to contribute here."*

That message hurts. It's not unusual for anyone to hear that message today. It's the way the world works.

Now, would you like to hear a different message?

Jesus is putting together a team. There is room on His team for you and there are openings at all positions.

For this "game," there are no bleachers to sit on and there is no bench to warm. He is inviting you to play. He wants you in the game.

On-the-job training will overcome any lack of experience. Jesus values availability and teachability. He will equip you so that you can contribute to what He's doing in the world.

No, you may never be invited to serve on a mayoral blue-ribbon committee, and Coach Pop may not call you to help the Spurs rebuild.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is inviting you to serve as a part of His great, redemptive, life-changing mission. And if there is one thing we've seen in recent weeks, it is that serving Jesus is the path to experiencing His abundant life, here and now.

This morning, we'll turn to one major New Testament passage AND we'll look at a minor New Testament character to learn about serving Jesus. First, to the major passage: 1 Corinthians 12.

Background to 1 Corinthians 12...

The Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the church in the city of Corinth to address problems the church was having. And did they ever have problems.

There were relational fractures, lawsuits between members, and flagrant immorality. Paul guided them through those landmines.

He was a single man, but he gave inspired advice about both singleness and marriage. He wrote about how Christians should deal with "grey areas" where there was no clear command from God (questionable matters about days and diets). He gave instructions about proper worship practices.

Then, deep into the letter (at chapter 12), he turned his attention to the theme of believers in a church serving Jesus. And that thought prompted him to bring up spiritual gifts.

Paul's main theme when it came to spiritual gifts was that God has uniquely gifted each believer with a capacity to impactfully serve His purposes.

That applied to every Christian in Corinth, and it applies to every believer in Jesus here, today.

In the first three verses of this chapter, Paul reminded the Corinthians of their journey to Jesus.

They had been delivered to life in Jesus from the spiritually bankrupt world of idolatry. They believed that idols were powerful things, and that idols of wood or bronze represented lordly gods and goddesses. So, they would proclaim, "*Zeus / Ares / Artemis is lord!*"

In the same way, the Romans shouted, "*Caesar is Lord!*" - and to say that anyone else was lord was to be an enemy of the state.

But when these Corinthians believed in Jesus, they came to see that Caesar and Zeus were not Lord. Jesus is Lord.¹ And that - JESUS IS LORD - is the two-thousand-year long motto of the church.

Jesus is KING of kings and LORD of lords. He proved it by rising from the dead. And, because He is Lord, He alone can give eternal life to anyone who believes in Him.

Everything that Paul wrote applied to every believer in Corinth and it applies to every believer in Jesus here today.

He wants us to know that spiritual giftedness is a "God thing." It is, first, Holy Spirit of God thing.²

The Trinity's Role in Equipping Us to Serve (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Gifts

[4] Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

A spiritual gift is a special ability to serve Jesus. This special enablement is given to each believer in Jesus by the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

Not every Christian has the same spiritual gift, and that is purposeful. There are varieties of gifts.

Tragically, the Corinthians honored some gifts above others and used the gifts to stir up division in the church.

They were like kids on Christmas morning bragging about the gifts they received rather than gratefully enjoying and using their gifts.

We are to gratefully receive whatever gift God gives us, value that gift, and then use that gift to serve Him in concert with other Christians who have received other gifts.

Accepting that these spiritual enablements to serve Jesus have come as gifts from the Spirit does away with all rivalries and feelings of superiority or inferiority. Every ability or talent to serve God we possess is something we have received from the Spirit of God.

You have been given a spiritual gift by God the Holy Spirit. Your gift won't be the same one I have. That's OK.

I have a teaching gift and a pastoral gift. Maybe you have a special giftedness for administration or leadership or helps or generosity or mercy.

The source for your giftedness and the source for mine is the same. The Holy Spirit gave you and me our gifts.

Paul next highlights the role of Jesus in Christian service.

Jesus Gives Contexts in Which to Exercise Those Gifts

¹ As well, when in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament God is referred to by His proper name "YHWH," it is translated "Lord" (kurios) in Greek, the same word used for "Lord" here in 1 Corinthians 12:3.

² This is one of the most distinctly Trinitarian passages in the New Testament.

[5] And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

Just as the Spirit distributes a wide and diverse variety of gifts to Christians, so ***“the Lord”*** (i.e. - Jesus) provides a setting in which that spiritual gift may be exercised.

Imagine ten Christians who all have the same gifting from the Spirit. Let’s say they are all gifted evangelists. They will all have unique settings in which they exercise their gifts.

One may hold huge, open-air crusades. Another may lead neighborhood Bible studies. A third may witness at her workplace. A fourth may share Jesus with classmates. A fifth will be salt and light as an Air Force flight surgeon. A sixth may do street evangelism.

Or say that ten Christians are gifted by the Spirit to teach. One Christian may teach in a seminary classroom, another to kids in a Sunday School class, another in a one-on-one discipleship setting. One will teach 4-year-olds and another High Schoolers and a third a Sunday afternoon Bible study at a Nursing Home.

There are an infinite number of settings in which a Christian might put his or her gift to use. Jesus opens doors of opportunity so that we can serve Him here or there, in this context or in that setting.

We have each been given a gift by the Holy Spirit to serve AND we have each been given a setting in which we can exercise that gift by the Lord Jesus. And...

The Father Gives Impact as We Exercise Those Gifts

[6] There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

God (the Father) is the One who gives the results. What a liberating thought. Effects are up to God.

Take two equally gifted Christians, both having received, say, the gift of teaching.

One may teach thousands of people through on-line seminars. The other may teach a small-ish class of young children in a church after-school program at a community center. Both will be used by God to touch lives.

One evangelist will travel to Central America where the fields are white for harvest and will see thousands believe in Jesus in a few short years. Another may go to a harder place and spend years seeing a very few people come to faith. Again, God is in charge of results.

I learned a definition of evangelism as a High Schooler when I was involved with Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ).

I was taught that successful evangelism is *“sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to God.”*

That’s really helpful. And it’s a definition that works to describe any service for the Lord.

We teach or give or encourage or lead in the power of the Holy Spirit - and leave the results to God.

Of course, we should be as prepared and as strategic as possible in the exercise of our spiritual gifts.

But the most important determiner of results for the exercise of any spiritual gift is NOT our planning, strategy, skill, or training. It is the energizing work of God.

And why have you and I been gifted by the Spirit to serve in this or that setting with impact of some kind and to some degree guaranteed by God?

Summary: The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts (v. 7)

[7] But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

All that God has done for you by gifting you, He has done that you might be His blessing to others. But if you hide your gift under a bushel, not so much.

There are definite downsides for NOT serving Jesus...

If you are not engaged in serving Jesus...

- ...GOD is grieved, just like you would be grieved if you gave your kid a brand-new car on her 16th birthday and she tossed the keys back to you and rode away on her bicycle.
- ...the CAUSE OF CHRIST is not being furthered as it would be if you were putting your gifts to use.
- ...our CHURCH is not benefiting from your service and is therefore not all that it could be if you were contributing your gift.
- ...and YOU aren't getting the joy that would come your way if you were, because joy accompanies service.

Serving Jesus by putting your gift to use for Him is the best possible way to live. So, what is your spiritual gift?

That's a question lots of people ask when the conversation turns to spiritual gifts. And it's an understandable question.

I'm not sure, though, that it's a critical question. If it was, I think Paul would have told us how we can know what our gift is.

Scripture answers the questions we should be asking. So, when you want to know what is important about a topic, look to see what the Bible tells you about it.

Based on what we read in the New Testament, it isn't clear to me that spending a lot of time discovering what gift God has given us is essential to effective service.

But if you're sitting here this morning, embracing the idea that the Spirit has given you a gift, and that the Son has prepared a setting in which you can exercise that gift, and that the Father will bring impact through your exercise of that gift, and you want to serve, and your question is, "*Where do I start serving?*", well, that's a great question.

And here's what I have found to be biblically sound and helpful for people who want to know where to start serving.

When wondering where to start serving...

1 - Pray for wisdom from God. Ask God to open your eyes to opportunities to serve.

2 - Be attentive to what you WANT to do. Pay close attention to your passions and desires for serving Jesus. God very frequently uses "want-to" motivation.

3 - Try different things. How do you know you won't love and be effective at working in the church Nursery, building homes for Habitat for Humanity, or volunteering for a Crisis Pregnancy Center, if you don't give it a try? Don't put limits on what you can or on what you should do. Try lots of things.³

But don't wait until you figure out what your gift is to start serving. Start serving. In the serving you'll discover how God has wired you for maximum impact for Jesus.

When you discover through trial and error what kinds of service best fit you, there will come another question. Will you pour yourself, body and soul, into that service? Will you serve there with all your heart?

That was exactly the question Paul had for one man in the first century church of Colossae.

Archippus. An Example for Us (Colossians 4:17)

Paul introduces us to this man near the end of his letter to the Colossians, with a highly individualized message.

[17] Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Who Was Archippus?

³ I could mention a fourth: Seek out loving, truthful feedback from friends. Ask your friends to tell you the truth, ask for their honest opinions about where they think you might effectively serve. Ask them to tell you where they have seen you be most effective.

We find Archippus' name in only one other place in the New Testament. When Paul jotted off a short note to his friend, Philemon, he mentioned [*Philemon 2*] *Archippus our fellow soldier*.

From this we gather that Archippus was a faithful follower of Christ and that he lived in Colossae. Beyond that, we know nothing about Archippus.⁴

Here in Colossians 4:17, though, Paul mentions a *“ministry”* Archippus had received *“in the Lord.”* What ministry was that?

What Was Archippus' Ministry?

One of my commentaries suggests that Archippus gave pastoral oversight to the church (Herbert Carson) - but there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that.

Another couple of scholars believe that he could have been an evangelist. Again, there is no biblical evidence for that.

Archippus' ministry is left undefined.

The word Paul used to describe his ministry - a word we, today, may associate with a formal church structure - is a word that is often translated simply, “service” (*diakonia*).

It is not a liturgical, or “stained-glass” word. (That word would be *leitourgia*).

So, his ministry / service could have involved preaching, leading music, waiting on tables, or sweeping floors.

One of my more honest books has this, *“It is difficult to be precise as to the particular form of ministry which had been committed to him.”*

I'll go you one better. It is not just difficult. It is *impossible* to know what ministry Archippus had received in the Lord.

Now, I'm sure that Archippus and the church in Colossae knew exactly what Paul was referring to. But Bible readers from the first century on haven't had a clue.

He might have had a ministry among the poor or the slave classes. He might have had a ministry to children, to lepers, or to the aristocracy. He might have been a teacher in the church, or a discipler of young converts.

It could have been anything.

And Paul tells Archippus, this faithful soldier of Jesus, to fulfill the ministry which he has received in the Lord.

Paul's Words to Archippus - and YOU!

The apostle's mention of Archippus and the ministry he had received in the Lord prompts a thought that forms the basis for the rest of what I have to say today.

This thought is the hook on which I hang my hopes that in the weeks, months, and years ahead, our church will be more God-honoring and more impactful than it's ever been.

Here it is:

If a minor New Testament figure like Archippus received a ministry from God, doesn't it make sense to assume that every believer in Jesus has received a ministry from God and needs to be careful to fulfill it?

If Archippus received a ministry in the Lord, why not everybody here at Northwest today in 2021? Why not you?

Why not accept the idea that the Lord Jesus has a position for you to play, good works for you to walk in (See Ephesians 2:10), a place on His team, a ministry to fulfill?

That's a pretty overwhelming thought, but I believe it's a valid thought. So, hang with me as we close out our time this morning. We're

⁴ One commentator (Abbott) thinks that Archippus may have been the son of Philemon, the man to whom “Philemon” was written. But there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that.

going to develop that thought in a way that I hope will breathe wind into your sails when it comes to serving Jesus.⁵

First, a thought about destinations.

You, Unleashed for Service (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Attendance is a launch pad, not a destination...

I think that attending a worship service - in person or virtually - is a good thing. I'm glad you're here, wherever here is for you.

But attendance at a worship service is not Mission: Accomplished, it's not the sum total of what Jesus wants from you or for you. There is more.

After a while of attending our church, I hope that you will get plugged into community and will grow as a worshipping disciple.

But it is not a "win" if you are ONLY plugged into community and taking part in worship. Involvement in the life of the church without ministry output, is not a kingdom win.

That's the problem with the Dead Sea in Israel. It's dead because there's only input and no output. For you to experience and to give LIFE, there must be output.

No, once you come to this or any church and start taking next steps with Jesus, the church is your launch pad into service.

As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "***the work of ministry***" - service! - belongs to the saints. And that's you. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Ministry internal to the church

Some of you will mostly fulfill that ministry / service within the structure of the church.

For all of us here, it will involve prayer and financial generosity. But your service might also involve loving on babies in the church nursery or serving the next generation of kids in Sunday School. You might join Josiah Gerhardt in equipping teens to follow Jesus.

You could help with the Men's or Women's Ministry, bake cookies, help the Deacons with set-up or clean-up, lead a Care Group or join the Praise Team.

You could very well find your ministry "sweet spot" by plugging into service here. And if you have giftings and passions to serve within the church, GREAT! You will bless lots and lots of people by your service here. Paul would applaud your service in the church, and I am so very grateful that so many of you serve Jesus here.

You who are serving Jesus in the church are serving those who are here AND those who aren't here yet.

That's great and necessary. You are providing a strong base that equips Christ-followers to move forward.

But here's the thing.

If we fill every ministry post here, there would still be lots of people NOT deployed into service because there are more people at Northwest than there are service slots in our formal ministry structure.

Our ultimate aim here is not to fill every service position at our church, because if that's all we cared to do, we wouldn't make much progress in reaching a needy city and world for Jesus.

So, some of you will fulfill your ministry outside of the structure of the church. You will serve those in Jesus' Name who don't attend any church and who may or may not ever come to our church.

That's also great and necessary.

Ministry external to the church

Existing ministries...

⁵ I am deeply indebted to Pastor and author Frank Tillapaugh, who wrote The Church Unleashed, a book that inspired me with a vision for "unleashing" Christians into service many years ago.

Jesus told us that we are His salt. So, we accept that our mission is to create thirst for His living water - the Gospel. (Matthew 5:13) And He told us that we are His lights. (Matthew 5:14-16) So, we accept that our mission is to shine for Him in our community.

Over the years, people from our church have served Jesus outside the church in lots of ways, shining and creating thirst.

Some have served children at community centers with after-school programs, others at crisis pregnancy centers providing hope to women in hard places, and others at military bases.

Some have served international students, victims of sex trafficking, in recovery ministries, teens, college students, and refugees - all in Jesus' Name.

There are dozens of ways in which you, a Jesus-follower could serve Him on the front lines in a well-established ministry right here in San Antonio.

Or the Lord might put it on your heart to create some entirely new way to serve and to push Jesus' purposes forward.

It's happened before, so let me tell you the story of Bread and Water.

Create from scratch...

Bread and Water began as the brainchild of a few High School and then college students many years ago here at Northwest.

The goal of Bread and Water, from the beginning, was to lavish value and love on people who were homeless in Jesus' Name. Provide food and conversation and the Gospel.

These young people gave great leadership to Bread and Water for years. After a while Ken Eberhardt took the reins, until his health failed. Then James Stopher led for a while.

Over the years that Bread and Water was around, many of the recipients experienced God's love through those who served them.⁶

Several came to faith in Christ. For several years there were great times here in worship, great friendships, reciprocal ministry, and quite a few meaningful memorial services for those who passed away.

And here's the thing. Bread and Water wasn't thought up by staff or elders.

Members of the Body thought it up, organized it, and led it. And over the years of Bread and Water's presence, homeless men and women and our church were thoroughly blessed.

Initiatives like Bread and Water happen when believers in Jesus embrace the idea that they are gifted to serve with impact by God.

That's why we currently have a Food Pantry, Citizenship classes, English as a Second Language classes, and a recovery ministry.

I have long been impressed (no longer surprised) at the capacity for creativity that lives in the hearts of Jesus' followers when it comes to finding ways to serve as salt and light in the world.

You can serve Jesus in the larger community, at your workplace, at school, in your neighborhood, in your home, or here, at your church.

It need not be grandiose or flashy, and it certainly need not occur within the church. Under the radar and behind the scenes service IS Kingdom-of-God sized stuff.

But in Jesus, that are no mission nobodies. You are a mission somebody. And Jesus' mission moves forward when you serve Him.

Conclusion:

⁶ Bread and Water never asked for anything from the church except recognition, prayer, and counsel. No one was ever made to feel guilty for not being involved. People served whose hearts stirred them to serve.

It is not my job to tell you where to serve. That's between you and the Holy Spirit.

It is my job to assure you that you are gifted by the Spirit, that the Lord Jesus will provide a setting in which you can exercise that gift, and that you will make an impact, courtesy of your Father in heaven.

You are an Archippus, invited and called to serve where you are gifted and passionate.

Paul would say to you, "*(Your name), take heed to the ministry that you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.*"