

Summary

Serving others is essential, modelled by Jesus and commanded in love. The church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, combats suffering and injustice today, guided by spiritual gifts and fruit. Embrace the Spirit's power for effective ministry and spiritual growth, fulfilling God's plan.

Call to Worship

Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord. (Ps 117)

Worship in song: by G Kendrick

1. From heaven You came, helpless babe, entered our world, Your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve, and give Your life that we might live.

This is our God, the Servant King, He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the Servant King.

2. There in the garden of tears, my heavy load He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn, "Yet not my will, but Yours," He said ...
3. Come see His hands and His feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered ...
4. So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone Him;
Each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving ...

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Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 91

Prayer of confession

Living God,

You filled the universe with light: Forgive us for wandering in dark places.

You filled our lives with purpose: Forgive us for choosing to live for ourselves.

You filled our need for significance with love: Forgive us for depriving others of that love.

You filled our ache for meaning with truth: Forgive us when we think we know better.

God of purpose, love and truth, have mercy on us and restore us to the light of your presence in which the shadows of sin must flee, in which we can see the way ahead, and in which we see your glory. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn 1:9)

Holy Communion

There was day, once a year, when the entire Jewish nation held its breath as they asked themselves whether God could possibly forgive his people yet again?

It was the job of the High Priest to perform a ceremony that enabled the Jewish people to access the forgiveness of God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, two goats were brought to the temple. One goat was sacrificed to symbolically pay the price for the sins of the people. The other goat stayed alive. The High Priest would place his hands on the head of the goat and symbolically transfer the sins of the people to the goat. This goat was then taken out of the city and set free in the wilderness. It became the scapegoat who symbolically took the sins of the people away.

The Day of Atonement was a vital day in the life of God's people. On this day, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed goat (or lamb) in the Holy of Holies. This was a room in the heart of the temple that symbolised the very presence of God. The room was considered so holy that only the High Priest was allowed to go there once a year to perform this ritual.

As important as these rituals were, the Jews knew that no sacrifice of an animal could ever really take away the sins of the people. God required this ritual because he was making the point that sin could not be overlooked. It needed to be dealt with. God instituted this ritual because it foreshadowed a time in history when he would come to us as the man Christ Jesus. Jesus would allow himself to be sacrificed on a cross and shed his blood for your sins and mine. He did this to pay the price for our sins that would otherwise disqualify us from God's presence.

Before Jesus died, he asked us to remember his sacrifice by sharing bread and wine together. This we gladly do.

Thank you Lord Jesus for paying the price for our sins on the cross. We honour you as we share bread and wine together.

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving Heavenly Father,

You did not leave us ignorant of your truth – for you gave us your written word.
You did not choose to be aloof from us – so you chose human hands to write it.
You did not give us more than we could understand – so you revealed your truth progressively until Christ's teaching completed it.

You did not limit your truth to one generation – but embedded your principles in the culture of the time in ways that are relevant to all generations.

You did not allow your revelation to be chaotic and lack integrity – but ensured it displayed consistency, logic and harmony throughout the hundreds of years of its compilation.
You did not force our faith – but invited us to read your word and be changed by it.

Lord God, we bless you and praise you for your word in Scripture. Our promise to you is this: We will not revise it, ignore it or deride it. We will honour it and do all we can to obey it in the strength you give us. Thank you.

The Message: Serve by God's Spirit

Serving others is not an option. The same Jesus who said, *"I am among you as one who serves"* (Lk 22:27) also said, *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you"* (Jn 13:15). However we are not to simply to serve others, we are to serve them with a particular manner. Paul puts it clearly when he says that we are *"to serve one another in love"* (Gal 5:13).

We are to do this, because God has a plan. God has a plan to rescue his people and his creation back to himself through the ministry of his church. God is working actively against suffering, evil and oppression through his people – the church. Christianity does not simply give a facile response to the problem of suffering based only on a future hope. On the contrary, it also directs believers to work at overcoming suffering and injustice whenever they see it today.

However, we are not to wear ourselves out trying to serve others in our own strength alone. God has promised to teach us through his Spirit; empower our ministry by his spirit; and grow the fruits of God's spiritual character within us through his Spirit. As such, Christians are not called simply to serve... but to serve by God's Spirit – which is altogether a different and infinitely more hopeful scenario!

It would be unthinkable for the Apostle Paul to do his ministry just in his own strength. It was also unthinkable to Jesus that we should do the work of the church without being empowered by the Holy Spirit. He told his disciples not to do any ministry until they had been baptised in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

The disciples did as Jesus said, and a week later (on the day of Pentecost) the Holy Spirit came upon them. And when it did, the disciples were turned into a team of evangelists.

Jesus promised that the same Holy Spirit would be available to all his followers. This was in fulfilment of God's promise of the return of God's personal presence to his people.

The Apostle Paul also understood that the gift of the *"Holy Spirit of promise"* (Eph 1:13) was evidence that the future operation of God's kingdom had already been set in motion. The church (as an 'end-time' community) is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out its "already/not yet" existence.

Therefore, we are not to allow our ministry to be enfeebled by failing to embrace the empowerment of God's Spirit. Paul demonstrated this. For him, evangelism involved two things:

- It began with people hearing the gospel.
- The truth of the gospel message was then confirmed by a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power. (2 Cor 3:3). As the theologian, Gordon Fee, says: the apostle Paul *"insists that his preaching, all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, was an effective combination of word and deed (Rom 15:18-19) ...It would never occur to him that the miraculous would not accompany the proclamation of the gospel."*¹

¹ Gordon D. Fee *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Hendrickson, 1996), p.78. This book has been formative of many of the ideas mentioned here.

We are, therefore, not left to ourselves. The Holy Spirit is present, as our constant companion, to direct and empower us. Let's look at what Jesus said about his provision for us of the Holy Spirit

Read: Jn 14:12-17, 25-26; Jn 15:26; Jn 16:7-8, 12-14.

Before Jesus left his disciples, he promised them that he would send them another counsellor, (the Holy Spirit) who would help them (Jn 14:16-17). Jesus explained that although the Holy Spirit had been "with" the disciples, helping them in their ministry, they could look forward to a time when the Holy Spirit would be "in" them (Jn 14:17). The disciples could therefore look forward to a time when the Holy Spirit would be within them to direct and empower them just as Jesus had done when he was with them.

Jesus even said that it would be better that he left, because that meant he could send the Holy Spirit to us, and that as a result, we would do even greater things than he did (Jn 14:12; 16:7).

This outpouring of the Holy Spirit to all believers was foretold in the Old Testament in Joel 2:28-29. The Apostle Peter quoted this when he explained to the crowd what had happened to the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21).

The gift of the Holy Spirit to us allows two things:

1) First, the Holy Spirit gives each one of us **spiritual gifts**, in order to empower our ministry. We are to work together with our gifts in order to build up one another and grow God's church. Some of these gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 are:

- ability to give a message of wisdom,
- ability to give a message of knowledge,
- ability to have great faith (beyond that which is normal),
- gifts of healings (plural),
- ability to do miraculous things in God's name
- gift of prophecy (speaking out God's word to people)
- ability to distinguish between good and evil spirits,
- ability to speak in tongues (praying in an unlearned language)
- ability to interpret tongues.

Spiritual gifts are supernatural Spirit-empowered abilities. They are not just a person's natural giftedness, although the Holy Spirit can take an area of natural giftedness and sharpen it up to the level of a spiritual gift.

2) The second thing the Holy Spirit does is to allow us to grow spiritual **fruit** within us. We become able to develop the fruit (or characteristics of God) within us as we surrender to God's leadership in our lives. As Gordon Fee puts it, "*When we receive the Spirit at conversion, divine perfection does not set in, but divine infection does.*"² The spiritual fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. These are the characteristics we are to allow the Holy Spirit to grow in us.

² Fee, Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God, p.112

Serve By God's Spirit

'Spiritual gifts' are unearned gifts given by God to empower our ministry. They will be redundant when we are in heaven. However, 'spiritual fruit' are the characteristics which we allow the Spirit to develop within us over time, and these will be rewarded in heaven.

For the apostle Paul, life in the Spirit meant embracing both fruit and gifts simultaneously. We are to do the same.

Read: Eph 1:17-21

1. God's desire is that we grow in the knowledge of God and grow in the knowledge of his hope.
2. This hope is predicated on receiving two abilities from God:
 - 1) an ability to appreciate our inheritance as children of God (v.18)
 - 2) and our ability, as believers, to have access to God's Holy Spirit power (v.19) – the same power, incidentally, that God the Father used to raise Jesus from the dead (vv.19-20). This no insignificant power! The word for power is the Greek word "*dunamis*" from which we get our word 'dynamite'!

Later on, Paul writes in the same letter:

"For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:14-16).

Conclusion/Response

Will you:

1. know your spiritual inheritance
2. seek to be open to God's Spirit every day (Eph 5:18)
3. operate in faith with the expectation of the Holy Spirit's empowerment?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Col 3:15)

This service was provided by Nick Hawkes for HopeNet SA

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

God's order: Ephesians 4:11-16

You will need:

the materials to make a puppet. This is how you do it:

- Two lollipop sticks = 2 legs
- Two half lollipop sticks = 2 arms
- One quarter of a lollipop stick = neck
- A half a lollipop stick = body.
- Drill a small hole (with a needle, drill or skewer) right at the end of every stick.
- Cut out a round piece of cardboard for the head.

Prepare all these things before the lesson.

Note: This lesson works even better if you use much larger slats of wood than lollipop sticks. If you can, do so. Just make everything bigger.

Ask the children to help you make a special kind of string puppet. Explain that you want to make this special kind of string puppet in order to teach them something.

Begin the lesson by labelling all the body parts with a felt tip pen as follows:

- Neck = Prophets
- Body = Pastors
- One leg = Apostle
- Other leg = Evangelist
- One arm = Teachers
- Other arm = You
- Head = JESUS

As you do so: explain what a each one means:

- Prophet = someone who knows what God wants to say to people and who tells them.
- Pastor = someone who cares for people in the church
- Apostle = someone who is a begins a number of new churches
- Evangelist = someone who is particularly gifted at telling people about Jesus
- Teacher= someone who teaches about Jesus well

Turn all the sticks over to hide the labels and ask the children to decorate the body parts (perhaps putting little cardboard hands and feet on the end). You can stick cloth on to make trousers and coats if you want to.

Lay out the parts to make a stick person. Overlap the bottom of the neck with the top of the body and with the ends of both arms so that the holes all line up.

Serve By God's Spirit

Put in a pin and bend its edges down to make a hinge joining them all together. Then hinge the top of the legs to the bottom of the body in the same way.

Stick the head on the top of the neck.

Tie (or tape) a piece of cotton to the ends of the legs and arms and feed them up behind the head where you stick the ends in place. Place the puppet on a table top and move its head from side to side. This should make the arms and legs move.

Don't worry if it all goes disastrously wrong, as it should still be fun and will still enable you to teach the meaning of Ephesians 4:11-16.

Hinge the bottom of the neck

Show how a string puppet works. Make one

Use the puppet to explain the teaching of Ephesians 4:11-16.

God wants apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, teachers and you to be part of his church. However, his church can only work properly if they all keep connected with Jesus, the head.

Finish by talking about how we keep connected with Jesus. We keep connected by prayer and reading the Bible.