



GIFTS, GRACE & CALLINGS  
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*"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all." – 1Corinthians 12: 4-7*

*"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." – Romans 12: 4-8*

Success in life is largely due to knowing one's God-given gifts, grace and calling and making the best use of them. But simple as it seems, only few people know their callings and get to discover their gifts and grace in a lifetime. This is why only a few succeed in the true sense of it while the vast majority simply drifts along. Most men are mere echoes or photocopies; only a few have real voice among men and are originals. However, we all can live the original life God designed and desired for us because we all have our God-given gifts, grace and callings. If only we would discover and operate in them without comparing ourselves with others or try to copy them, we would definitely succeed. This is the crux of the matter!

In Genesis 41, King Pharaoh of Egypt dreamt twice regarding the famine that was to ravage his land and the surrounding nations at that time. In the first dream he saw seven ugly and gaunt cows came out of the river and another set of seven fine looking and fat ones. The seven gaunt cows swallowed up the fat ones without any change in stature. In the second dream, he saw seven poor & dry heads of corn on a stalk and another set of full, nice-looking heads of corn on its stalk. Again, the seven poor corn heads swallowed up the good ones and still looked so poor. Pharaoh was troubled as he was convinced God was talking to him yet he could not decode or understand the message. He summoned all the magicians and astrologers of Egypt but none could interpret the dreams or understand the mystery.

Eventually, the Palace Chief Butler remembered how Joseph helped interpret his dream and the Baker's in Prison and so suggested the king send for him. When Joseph arrived, the ease with which he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams was unparalleled and amazed all. Ultimately he was appointed Minister-in-Charge to manage the coming crisis. Joseph could do it because he operated in his God-given gifts and grace. He was born with this grace from God to dream and interpret dreams. The same could be said of Daniel who in Daniel 2 interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar after a long search for interpreters and none was found. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar had even forgotten his dream and threatened to kill all the wise men, magicians and astrologers in his domain if they fail to interpret it before Daniel rescued the situation and interpreted the dream that even the dreamer had forgotten. He was eventually promoted as the Chief Administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. He also read and interpreted the hand writing King Beltechazzar saw on the wall in Daniel 5 that none of the astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers could read or interpret. Nothing works like a man's gifts, grace and calling.

David also was a wonder boy to the Jews of his time. He achieved a feat King Saul, his elder brothers and the entire army of Israel could not achieve with their swords and shields when he faced and killed Goliath with just a stone and sling. It was simply miraculous! Later, Saul eyed him with envy and sought to kill him but when the grace of God is upon a man's life, the more men seek to destroy his dream, destiny or God's plan for him the more they will hasten its fulfillment. King Saul only succeeded in destroying himself and not God's plan for David. Only bad engines make noise, emit much smoke and generate heat while working. Good engines work quietly with little or no friction and smoke. A man operating in his God-given gifts, grace and calling will not struggle or be frustrated but will work as though playing; almost effortlessly and with joy. He will be a surprise and wonder to all!

Now, consider the case of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons who offered strange fires before the Lord and were smitten in Leviticus 10. They ministered outside the scope of God's grace for their lives. King Saul also in 1Samuel 13: 8-10 simply because Samuel delayed crisscrossed from his office as king to offer the sacrifice Samuel the prophet should offer. As a result, God rejected him. King Uzziah (also known as Azariah) in 2Chronicles 26: 16-21 was struck with leprosy when he forcefully entered the temple to usurp the priestly office. All these are examples to teach us that we cannot function without God's unction. Our life engine cannot run smoothly if we do things God has not committed to our charge or equipped us for with His gifts and grace. That way, we would only be a round peg in a square hole or a square peg in a round hole.

A fish doesn't struggle to swim and a bird has no difficulty flying. Nobody teaches a cock to crow, the dog to bark or lion to roar. The monkey is a talented natural acrobat and gymnast. So is every man that functions in his God-given gifts, grace and calling. He will run and not be weary, and work and not faint. There is this funny story of the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria's first president) during a visit to England with his friend the late Dr. K. O. Mbadiwe. They were both served vegetable salads. While Zik was busy munching away as he was widely traveled and already used to it, Mbadiwe was just struggling to swallow the leaves. At a point he looked at Zik curiously and asked, 'Nnamdi, Nnamdi, they cook ya own.' He thought Zik's vegetable was cooked and his raw but really they were served the same thing. Just that he was only accustomed to the typical Nigerian boluses and not fresh un-sliced vegetables. That is how many people struggle through life as they do what God has not called or equipped them for.

The Bible teaches that there are diversities of gifts. These gifts are quite important especially the motivational ones. These are the gifts that motivate a man's ministry and run through all he does. We succeed in life and ministry by identifying and using our motivational gifts to the fullest potential. Some of these gifts listed out for us in Romans 12: 6-8, 1Corinthians 12: 4 and Ephesians 4: 11 include Prophecy, Service (or Ministry), Exhortation, Giving, Teaching, Government (or Administration or Leadership), Mercy (or Helps or Compassion), Word of wisdom (or Wisdom), Word of knowledge (or Knowledge), Faith, Healing, Miracles, Discerning of spirits, Divers kinds of tongues, Interpretation of tongues, Apostles, Evangelists and Pastors.

Others that could be seen in people's lives but not necessarily included in this list are the gifts of Music (Ability to sing and lead in praise and worship), Visitation, Intercession, Celibacy and Martyrdom. The list really is not exhaustive. In fact, all our peculiarities are gifts from God and confer on us certain grace in life; starting from

our gender, height, stature, temperament as well as age and position in the family. Our talents, trainings and skills also should be seen as gifts from God for there are countless others who don't have the opportunities we have in life. These are the individual make-ups that help us do with ease what others find so tough and difficult. It is an error to say, 'what a man can do, a woman can do better.' The truth is there are lots of things men can do that women cannot do and also lots of things women can do that men cannot do.

Tall, light complexioned and slim people enjoy certain grace over others who are short, dark and fat. For example, I have generally noticed that short, dark complexioned and fat ladies rarely win beauty contests and only tall people play basket ball. But there are occasions too when all that becomes a disadvantage and short, fat or dark skinned people are favoured. For example only sturdy people with big muscles lift weights or fight in sumo wrestling. You will notice that for reasons best known to God certain sports and professions are dominated by blacks and others by whites. Some are even peculiar or localized to certain geographical areas. That is why East and Central Africans usually dominate marathon races, Brazilians football, Americans basketball, Asians martial arts and Europeans swimming. Life is beautiful and meaningful only when we function in our God-given gifts, grace and callings.

Whereas the Bible describes Jacob as introverted and homely, Esau his twin brother was an extrovert and outgoing man of the field. Whereas King Solomon was famous and lived in stupendous wealth and affluence, John the Baptist the fore-runner of Christ centuries after him lived such a poor and lonely life in the wilderness. His clothes were made of animal skin and hide and he ate locusts and wild honey. The standard of living at his time was not that poor. It was only a matter of his gifts, grace and calling. Thank God John the Baptist was not distracted and did not disappoint God. He fulfilled his ministry! Mary, Lazarus' sister also was introverted and so sat with Jesus and listened to Him when He visited them. Martha her sister was all over the place busy trying to entertain Christ and prepare food for all. She would not stop at that alone. She complained to Jesus about her sister's uncaring attitude and requested that she be asked to join her. But for Jesus, Mary's attitude towards the word of God mattered most.

Avoid envy, strife, unnecessary competitions and all forms of distractions knowing for sure that no one really can take your place before God. Seek to understand your peculiar gifts, grace and calling, be effective and faithful and never fall for the common temptation to compare your self with others to emulate them. Never succumb to societal or peer pressure to do what God has not called or equipped you

for. Don't follow popular trends and opinions too. Live your life to please God only and not any man because really, He is the One you're accountable to in the end. We should therefore stay focused and on track to do only those things God has given us gifts and grace for and for which He has called us. That is a major key to success in life and ministry. That way, we would not run or live in vain.

Eventually according to Proverbs 18: 16 every man's gifts would make way for him in life and James 1: 17 stresses the point that God is the source of these gifts. Every man's motivational gifts are built-in at creation (Psalm 139: 13-16) and could even be observed from childhood. They are usually seen in all we do and how we see things generally as is the case with Joseph's dreams and the activities of Mary and Martha. Like Apostle Paul advised Timothy in 2Timothy 1: 6, we are to stir up our gifts and use them. Practise makes perfect. Constant use of our gifts eventually leads to expertise.

*"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." – 1Peter 4: 10*

Finally, God blesses us in order to make us a blessing. We should never forget the purpose of our gifts, grace, callings and ministry (in any form). We are to equip and help perfect the saints. We are called to edify the body of Christ and serve the brethren as occasion demands. We should be faithful and never forget also the need for oneness, cooperation and submission to constituted spiritual authority in the use of our gifts, grace and callings. Let us do everything decently and in good order.