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Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men. Ephesians 4:8 ESVThis is my birthday week. I turned 75...seems old when I think it is 3/4 of a century, but when I think my oldest sister turns 95 this year, I am young. Usually, with birthdays, gifts come. This year my daughter blessed me with "pets" as a glass fishbowl and the pets were glass underwater creatures that hang from clear globes! It is quite ingenious and the best sort of "pet" for someone like me, who enjoys the freedom of coming and going without the concern of animals. They are pretty and remind me of the aquariums my husband Darryl used to keep, without all the work.I didn't expect this gift, but it was given. I found a place to put them (yes, she gave me two!) and they make me smile. Some gifts I have received over the years are nice to be remembered, but not always kept in sight or eventually make their way to others (or a thrift store). These "pets" are not necessarily life changing, but because my daughter gave them, they are precious. I know the giver, therefore, I value the gift more.As pondered gift giving, gift receiving and gift retaining, I thought about the best gift giver yet--our Lord! A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. I Corinthians 12:7. NLT. So each of us have been given at least one gift from God to help others. This is not just for ourselves, but it is to help the whole body of Christ. Paul elaborates on these gifts: To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another and to someone else, the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. HE alone decides which gift each person should have. I Corinthians 12: 3-11. I would like to ask you--have you been given one of these gifts? Are you using them? Or are they stuck in a drawer?Maybe you say I don't know about that list. I can't say I have one of those? Pray, ask the Lord to show you the gift you have been given. But if you are a believer you have already received your first gift, the gift of salvation. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8 ESV. So I must ask, what are you doing with this gift of salvation? Are you becoming a disciple of Jesus? Is this gift activated in your life? Or does it sit in the drawer as maybe your Bible? I pray not. This is the most precious gift, bought with a very heavy price tag, the death of God's own Son. Don't take it for granted.Romans 12:6-8, Paul reiterates some of the same gifts the body of Christ has been given, but then he adds a few others. In this grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. I think we can all find something in this list He has given us to do. Oh my friends, God needs you to use your gifts. Do not hide them under a bushel, or in a drawer or in selfishness, but dust them off and use them. I have a feeling, each of us wants other people to use their gifts for our benefit--it works both ways. Start sowing your gift and see what happens!God gave His body these gifts for a reason. He very carefully tells us why they have been given, so we can't be confused! The KJV says it like this: For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12. Perhaps churches struggle to grow and develop ministries and leaders because we don't want to be "perfected", built up and do the work of the ministry. We may settle for babyhood, instead of maturity. My friends, God's plan is for us to grow and develop and become pillars in His house. Many want nothing built on them, maybe because they struggle with fear and feeling of inadequacy because the teachers who were supposed to teach them have abandoned their posts. Spend time with your Lord. Ask Him to show you where and how He wants you to serve in His body. If you need teaching, ask Him to show you what to do about it. Talk with your pastor or elders. They would love to help you. Submit to His ways and He will lead and guide you into all good paths. Paul told Timothy, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands". 2 Timothy 1:6. ESV. Or, as the KJV says, "Stir up the gift." I am imploring you to fan your gift today. Your pastor and church need you to function in your gifting. This will make our God smile. Perfection is not a prerequisite, willingness to submit to authority is and have a teachable spirit is.Remember when Jesus said the field are white and ready for harvest? He then asked them to pray for laborers? We are those laborers the world needs. Your mother needs, your grandchild needs, your aunt or uncle needs that you have been praying for... Open those gifts you have been given. You will be glad you did. I discovered some prophetic words my husband gave in August 2007 to Joy Church Medford (then Joy Christian Fellowship). What a delight it was to read them and know they have come to pass, above and beyond our expectations. God's Word releases momentum and hope. If we don't speak it, it may still happen, but with much more effort. God's Word speaking through Darryl, increased faith and vision for that House. Don't silence His Voice through you. It doesn't have to be prophetic. Often a word of encouragement or appreciation can do the same thing.Father, I thank you, that You are willing to trust us with Your precious gifts. I ask that you release teachers to Your body who will help equip, perfect and strengthen Your body now. Help us stir up the gifts of those around us, by our own obedience, In Jesus' Name, amen.  |

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