

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

**Good Shepherd Church, August 27, 2023**

## **"Spiritual Gifts and Stewardship"**

Growing up, one of the models I had for teaching was my dad. And I'll be honest with you - my dad was not always the best teacher. My dad was one of those people who would get easily frustrated with teaching and would just say "aww just let me do it."

As much as I loved him, I learned quickly that if I wanted to learn something, Dad probably wasn't the best one to teach me. When it came time for me to buy my first car, the one I wanted was a stick shift, but I didn't know how to drive a stick. So my dad tried to teach me, and it was the most frustrating experience trying to learn that I'd ever had.

So I quickly took him home, and said you know, I got this. And I drove back to my apartment, totally winging it, and I eventually figured out how to drive it on my own.

And, after that experience, I promised myself that if ever I had the chance to teach people, I would not fall into the same patterns as my dad.

They often say, sometimes we learn just as much about what NOT to do as we learn about what we are supposed to do when someone else is teaching us.

Many of you may remember from my first sermon that prior to becoming a pastor, I owned my own business.

I promised myself when I became a dog trainer that I would not teach people the same way my dad taught me. And in many ways, what my dad taught me ultimately was how to be a better teacher. So, I learned that I needed to meet people where they were at - I could not expect them to know everything I knew. That's why they came to learn, after all!

I took this approach with clients and with staff, and I also quickly realized that I could not just expect everything to be done exactly the way I wanted it done all the time. It could not be a "my way or the highway" approach, or I would never keep my staff around, and I would be fighting constant battles for perfection that I could barely expect from myself, let alone other people.

I also took the approach that my goal was to train people so well that they could eventually take over the business if they wanted to. Essentially, I wanted to train people so that they could do my job as well if not better than I could.

I was not worried about competition. I wanted to collaborate with my staff.

And, I wanted to help them grow. My goal was always to help them develop career skills, even if that meant they would eventually leave me and move on to better things. While they worked for me, I wanted them to become a better version of themselves.

Doing this meant I had to let go of certain things. Yes, I might have wanted some things done a certain way. But if there was not a safety, cleanliness, ethical, or other important reason something had to be done a certain way, it did me no good to force people to do things the way I did.

It did not matter if the towels were folded exactly the way I liked, or if the desk was organized the way I liked it. As the business became more successful, and I became busier with my pastoral internships and schooling, my staff did the majority of the work at the business anyway, so I could allow them the freedom to do things the way they wanted, as long as it didn't cause a safety or ethical concern.

As a pastor, I learned a lot from being a business owner. And one of the things I learned is that in church environments as well, people all have different skills, gifts, talents, and abilities, and people have different things they like to be responsible for. I had seen what happens at churches when pastors come in and put their foot down right away and say it's "my way or the highway."

Ministry is no longer a collaborative effort when a pastor does that, but instead it becomes a battle between the pastor's authority and the people who are doing much of the unpaid volunteer work.

Now of course, lacking leadership skills isn't a great thing for a pastor either. But it has to be about collaboration, not competition.

I never saw myself as competing with my staff - in fact, if it was a competition, I wanted them to become better than me! And I don't see my role in a church as a competition either. I see it as collaborative leadership, working with the skills that the congregation has.

As Paul says, present your bodies as a living sacrifice. For my purposes, I apply this to my own life by reminding myself that I need to set aside my own ego, present that as a living sacrifice to become even more holy and acceptable to God. If I hold onto ego, if I expect everyone to conform to my way of doing things, I squash other people's joy for ministry.

Paul goes on to say that we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but instead approach ourselves with sober judgment. Again, set aside our egos, collaborate, and build up the gifts of others.

If, as a business owner, I insisted on everything being done exactly as I wanted it done, I would have missed out on new ideas or new and better ways of doing things.

And if, as a pastor, I insisted that you all did things exactly as I said, I would stifle your own gifts for ministry and your own talents. And, I would be creating a whole lot more work for myself, too!

Likewise, if you all expect one another to do things exactly as YOU insist they are done, even if there are other ways of doing things that are equally as good, you squash one another's desire for collaborative ministry.

Paul reminds us today that we all have our own spiritual gifts and talents.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. Some of us are preachers, some are singers, some are musicians, some are administrators, some are teachers, some are caregivers, some are technology gurus, some are handy around the building, and the list goes on and on. And as we come together as a church, we share our gifts and talents with each other.

But Paul's word of caution remains: do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to.

I think the way this applies most in churches is that people often forget that just because you have certain gifts doesn't mean that others don't have those same gifts.

I have worked with a number of different churches, and it always seems the case that certain people are in charge of certain things, and everyone knows not to step on those people's toes. But in pigeonholing people into certain roles, we do two things: first, of course, we risk no one knowing what to do if something happens to the person responsible.

But, I think more importantly, we might end up stifling the gifts and talents someone else might have for those things. Rather than teaching others with similar gifts, helping them grow into their own talents for ministry, we suggest they try something else - something that may not be the best fit for them.

Or, worse still, we might discourage that person from volunteering for ministry roles at all because they feel they don't bring value to the church. This is where ego can get in our way. In some ways, Paul is speaking directly to us today in reminding us to set aside our egos and let the gifts of others shine, and by extension, this allows our own gifts to shine brighter.

In ministry, like in business, we leave ourselves open to risk when one or two people are the only ones responsible for a certain skill set. We also may not be the best stewards of our resources if we are holding onto our own egos. It is a difficult line to walk - one in which we are using our skills and abilities in the best way we know how, but in which we are also boosting the skills and talents of others around us.

What might it look like in life if everyone could set aside their ego - presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice - and lift up the gifts and talents of those around them. Humans tend to struggle with jealousy, and if we see someone else successfully using their skills and talents, we tend to want to compete with them, or show them up, or bring the spotlight back onto ourselves.

We all struggle with this! But what if, as we work to lift others up and boost the talents and skills of those around us, we start to become better stewards in our own right? When we set aside our own egos, we may suddenly be able to see the value and importance not only of the work we do, but the collaborative efforts we have with others.

God has given each of us skills and talents, and many of us use those skills and talents wisely and humbly. Nevertheless, Paul encourages us to set aside our own pride and instead focus on the talents of others, and in doing so, we lift ourselves up as well. We become good stewards of our collective time, talent, and even treasure.

We become more generous with our thoughts and deeds, more generous with our compliments and encouragement, and more generous with our gratitude toward those who give of their talents and time to support the community. And, we may even become more generous with our treasure if we become more aware of the needs of others and of our community.

In that way, our spiritual gifts become a catalyst for our stewardship, and stewardship begins to become a priority not just for us as individuals but for the community as a whole. It becomes a collaborative effort - one we can focus on collectively because we are individually lifting one another up, creating an uplifting, welcoming, and encouraging environment.

So, as Paul suggests, I encourage us all to set aside our own egos this week, notice the things that others in our church and our community do for the common good, and begin to think about how we are using our own time, talent, and treasure for the benefit of others.

As Christians, this is one of our calls. We are called to love God, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, but we are also called to be good stewards of our own time, talent, and treasure, but also of the community's time, talent, and treasure, and of course we are called to be good stewards of God's creation, which includes ourselves and our communities.

May you go from here today in renewed dedication to discovering your own talents and interests in ministry, but especially with renewed dedication to uplifting those around you, appreciating their spiritual gifts, and becoming more generous with your support and love for others. Amen.

Let us pray: Most generous and loving God, we pray today a prayer of gratitude for all that you have provided for us. We are grateful for our collective spiritual gifts that enable us to be a faithful community of Christ-followers. We are grateful for the financial resources we have at our disposal, and we are grateful for the talents of each of the individuals in this congregation who work tirelessly to build up our ministry and our church.

In that gratitude, we pray that you would help us remember to set aside our own egos if we are becoming too prideful, and instead put that energy into lifting up

those around us. In lifting others up, supporting them, and being mindful of how our words and actions affect them, we pray that you would also help us to use our own spiritual gifts in ways that honor You, your church, and this community.

With love and gratitude, we pray all of this in your name. Amen.