The Gift of Teaching and Exhortation: How God Wires Us to Build Each Other Up

God has placed specific gifts inside every believer, and understanding those gifts can change the way you see yourself and others in the body of Christ. This post explores two of those gifts: the gift of teaching and the gift of exhortation. Both want the same outcome for people, but they go about it in very different ways.

What Are Motivational Gifts and Why Do They Matter?

Romans 12:6-8 lays out a list of gifts that God distributes to believers according to His grace:

"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly. If prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; and he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." - Romans 12:6-8

There are seven motivational gifts described here. Most people have one dominant gift, and may overlap into one or two others. These gifts shape how you see problems, how you help people, and how you naturally engage with the world around you.

What Is the Gift of Teaching?

Teaching, at its core, means to instruct by word of mouth. But it goes much deeper than that. A person with the gift of teaching loves to discover and validate truth. They are drawn to digging into Scripture the way a gold miner digs for gold, looking past the surface to find what lies beneath.

How Does a Teacher Approach the Bible?

A teacher builds understanding the way a lawyer builds a case. They move from point A to point B to point C in a clear, logical sequence. They want to lay a foundation before introducing deeper concepts, because they believe that without a solid foundation, nothing built on top of it will stand.

They are drawn to word studies, looking at the original language behind a biblical term to get a fuller picture of what it means. They take Scripture in context rather than pulling a single verse out to prove a point. They are careful, methodical, and thorough.

What Are the Strengths of a Teacher?

- They emphasize accuracy in the Word of God
- They present truth in a systematic, easy-to-follow way

- They help others build a strong biblical foundation
- They love deep research and are willing to put in the work
- They never take Scripture out of context to make a point

What Are the Blind Spots of a Teacher?

Every gift has areas to watch out for. For teachers, the biggest challenge is that their love of information can sometimes crowd out practical application. They can give you a wealth of knowledge without helping you understand how to live it out.

- They may seem to trust intellect more than the Holy Spirit
- They can get so focused on proving a point biblically that they lose the audience
- They may stick to their prepared outline even when the Spirit is leading elsewhere
- Sharing too much detail can cause people to tune out
- They can come across as less warm or emotionally connected

The key distinction to remember is that knowledge is information, but wisdom is knowing how to apply that knowledge. A teacher must pursue both.

Who in the Bible Had the Gift of Teaching?

The Apostle Paul is a clear example. He was deeply trained in Hebrew Scripture, and much of the New Testament draws directly from Old Testament passages. After his conversion, Paul did not rush into ministry. He spent three years in Arabia searching the Scriptures and building his foundation before stepping into his calling. He understood that truth had to be grounded before it could be proclaimed.

What Is the Gift of Exhortation?

If the teacher is the one who builds the foundation, the exhorter is the one who comes alongside you and says, "You can do this." An exhorter is a positive encourager who calls people toward abundant living. They strengthen, comfort, and lift people up.

Most people are naturally drawn to an exhorter because everyone appreciates someone who believes in them.

How Does an Exhorter Approach People?

An exhorter is practical and people-focused. They want to see transformation, not just information. They love giving steps of action, practical formulas that help people move forward. They use personal examples and real-life stories to connect truth to everyday life.

They also feed off connection. When they are speaking or sharing, they are watching faces. They need to know they are reaching people, and that visible connection fuels them.

What Are the Strengths of an Exhorter?

- They make people feel seen, valued, and capable
- They are excellent at one-on-one discipleship
- They help people take practical steps toward growth
- They are grieved when teaching has no real-world application
- They do not give up on people easily

What Are the Blind Spots of an Exhorter?

Because exhorters are so focused on helping people move forward, they can sometimes oversimplify complex problems. Not every struggle has a three-step solution, and pushing too quickly toward a fix can make someone feel unheard.

- They may take Scripture out of context to make a point land
- They can be so eager to fix a situation that they stop listening
- They may focus so much on the goal that they forget the person in front of them
- Their enthusiasm can come across as dismissive of real pain

Who in the Bible Had the Gift of Exhortation?

Barnabas is the clearest example. His very name means "son of consolation." When the early church was afraid of the newly converted Saul (later Paul), Barnabas was the one who stepped in, vouched for him, and brought him into community. He saw potential where others saw a threat.

Later, when John Mark abandoned a mission trip and Paul refused to give him another chance, Barnabas took John Mark under his wing anyway. That is the heart of an exhorter: always willing to give someone another shot, always believing in what a person can become.

How Do These Two Gifts Work Together in the Church?

Teachers and exhorters can sometimes rub each other the wrong way. A teacher may feel the exhorter is too shallow. An exhorter may feel the teacher is too dry. But the body of Christ needs both.

We need to be grounded in truth, and we need to know how to live that truth out in the real world. We need the depth that a teacher brings, and we need the encouragement that an exhorter provides. One without the other leaves people either informed but stuck, or motivated but unrooted.

The goal is not to compete but to complement. When these gifts work together, people grow in both knowledge and confidence.

How Do You Know Which Gift You Have?

Pay attention to what naturally frustrates you or energizes you. If a speaker jumping around without a clear point bothers you, or if someone taking Scripture out of context makes you uncomfortable, you may lean toward teaching. If you find yourself naturally encouraging people, thinking about practical next steps, and wanting to see people move forward, you may lean toward exhortation.

Spiritual gifts tests are available and can be a helpful starting point. The most important thing is to begin paying attention to how God has wired you, and then start using that gift intentionally.

Life Application

This week, take one step toward identifying and using your gift. If you lean toward teaching, find one person you can share something meaningful from Scripture with, and make sure it includes a practical takeaway. If you lean toward exhortation, reach out to someone who is struggling and offer them genuine encouragement and a concrete next step forward.

Do not wait until you feel fully ready. The body of Christ needs what God has placed inside of you right now.

Ask yourself these questions as you reflect:

- Do I know what my motivational gift is, and am I actively using it?
- Am I living up to my potential in the body of Christ, or am I holding back?
- Is my gift being used to build others up, or am I keeping it to myself?
- Where do I see the blind spots of my gift showing up in my relationships?

God did not give you your gift for you to sit on it. He gave it to you so that the body of Christ would be stronger because you are in it.