

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local
Assembly”
Issues of Diversity
Understanding Spiritual Gifting

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Date: August 20, 2006
Title: Understanding Spiritual Gifting – Part II: The Holy Spirit works through every believer for the good of the body
Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-7
Purpose: The body of Christ is built for community and this is no less true when addressing the issue of spiritual gifting.

The purpose of this paragraph is . . .

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- Intellect – to help you *understand* that God has gifted you and through your gifting serves His body.
- Volition – to help you *chose* to serve God by serving His people.
- Emotion – to help you *love* serving as an expression of God’s love for you.

Introduction: Every believer should be exercising his spiritual gift in the context of local church ministry. I cannot tell you what that is or will be but I know that when you and I are exercising our gifting the body is unified and healthy.

Illustration:

Many of us marvel when we see the Olympic decathlon take place. The individuals have to master 10 different track and field events. We would sometimes like to be that individual, yet the Christian life is not the individual decathlon but the 4x400 meter relay race. No one can compete as an individual in the 4x400 meter relay race. It must be done as a team. Each individual on the 4x400 meter is relying on the other 3 team members. The Christian life is like this. There are no church members who are decathletes in ministry. There are only 4x400 meter relay race members.

Listen to the statement by John MacArthur on the importance of this spiritual gifting.

“Every member of Christ’s church has been given supernatural endowments, gifts of God’s Holy Spirit, which through the Spirit are God’s divine means of ministering His Word and power among His people and to the world. They are God’s supernatural provision for the edification of the church and the evangelization of the world. They are the means through which believers are to grow, worship, witness, and serve.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians [Moody, 1984], 278).

In our passage Paul is dealing with an abuse. It would appear from the context that the issue was the flaunting of a gift over other gifts and insisting that this gift was to take preeminence in the assembly.

“He goes on to correct another fault. As the Corinthians abused the gifts of God for ostentation and show, and love was little, if at all, regarded, he shows them for what purpose believers are adorned by God with spiritual gifts – for the edification of their brethren.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 20, 1 & 2 Corinthians [Baker, 1984], 395).

Initially when Paul addressed the Corinthian fellowship he noted how they were not lacking in any gift (1 Cor. 1:7). They had everything they needed to function as a healthy church. Thus the deficiency was not in its appearance but in its expression.

It is important to note how grace-gifting has as its outcome body unity. The gifts when exercised move the body of Christ toward unity. Thus we speak of gifting and unity in the same breath.

TRANSITION:

There are two primary ideas in verses 1-7. First, the establishment of unity. Here we answer the question, “On what basis do we have spiritual gifts?” Second, the expression of unity. Here we answer the question, “Why do we have spiritual gifts?” Let us begin by noting verses 1-3.

The passage outlined

I. The establishment of unity is built on the Tri-unity of God (vv. 1-3)

“Paul begins by reminding them of what every converted Corinthian knew that the Spirit had been operating in their lives. Their conversion from paganism and their confession of Jesus proves it.” (James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours: Studies in 1 Corinthians [BMH, 1971], 112)

Notice how all three members of the Trinity are cited in the first three verses. This same emphasis will be made in verses 4-6.

Verse three forms a conclusion based on the previous two verses. Because believers have the Holy Spirit in common and because the Holy Spirit is working the Lordship of Christ in believers, this work expresses itself through the exercising of His gifting for the common good of all believers. There are two ideas I desire to bring out from this verse. First is the idea of Jesus being Lord and secondly is the idea of the Holy Spirit.

A. Jesus is accursed/Lord (v. 3b)

This statement can be somewhat perplexing because anyone can “say” Jesus is Lord, so what exactly is meant.

“Nonbelievers – including false teachers – deny His sovereign lordship.” (David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” BKC, 533)

“It hardly needs to be said that these confessions spoken of in verse 3 involve more than pronouncing the words (cf. Matt. 7:21-23).” (James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours: Studies in 1 Corinthians [BMH, 1971], 112)

There is a difference between professing the Lordship of Christ and practicing the Lordship of Christ. Professing the Lordship of Christ does not automatically mean you possess the Lordship of Christ. But possessing the Lordship of Christ always has as its outcome the practicing of the Lordship of Christ.

The issue is not whether Jesus is Lord of your life or even in your life. This is a non-issue. You might not have made Jesus Lord when you received Him as your Savior but He is Lord; you will only affirm it as true both verbally and visually. There is no other kind of salvation than lordship salvation. This passage argues strongly that non-lordship equals non-believer. All believers affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION:

- Intellect – Jesus Christ is Lord of your gifting. He is Lord of how your gifting is exercised. Do you believe this?
- Volition – You need to *chose* to affirm His lordship in every area of life.
- Emotion – His lordship moves us to love Him. I celebrate Jesus as Lord.

TRANSITION:

Paul will present the idea that the Holy Spirit is the active agent in the gifting and expressing of grace-gifts. It is impossible if the Spirit is present not to have a spiritual gift. And where the Spirit is present Jesus is Lord.

B. The Holy Spirit (v. 3c)

Seven times the Holy Spirit is mentioned in verses 1-11 (vv. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). Here we see . . .

- He affirms the Lordship of Christ in His people (v. 3)
- Gifting diversity does not mean different Spirits (v. 4)
- The Holy Spirit is manifested through the gifts (v. 7)
- The Holy Spirit distributes the grace-gifts (vv. 8-11)

C.I. Scofield makes the following observation concerning the Holy Spirit and the content of chapters 12-14.

To each believer is given a spiritual enablement and capacity for specific service. No believer is destitute of such gift (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 27), but in their distribution the Spirit acts in free sovereignty (1 Cor. 12:11). There is no room for self-choosing, and **Christian service is simply the ministry of such gift as the individual may have received** (cf.) Romans 12:4-8. The gifts are diverse (1 Cor. 12:6, 8-10, 28-30), but all are **equally honorable because bestowed by the same Spirit**, administered under the same Lord, and energized by the same God [Emphasis added].

Each believer has the Holy Spirit and through His grace-gifting manifests the Spirit to others. This is the big idea behind verses 1-3. The Holy Spirit is emphasized throughout our passage.

TRANSITION:

As we think through this area of grace-gifting let us not lose sight of the idea that such expressions are revealing the Holy Spirit. They reveal Him.

II. The expression of unity is built on the Tri-unity of God (vv. 4-7).

Based on the initial thought of verses 1-3 Paul addresses the whole idea of how the gifting works. The fact that His body is one is based on the unity of the Godhead. Paul makes two points.

A. Grace gifting for body unity has a common source (vv. 4-6)

Paul once more stresses the idea that all “spiritual” gifts have a common source. John Wesley summarized this idea with the following thought.

“Divers streams, but all from one fountain.”

(John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes, <http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?b=46&c=12&com=wes>)

There are a variety of gifts, but the same Triune God (vv. 4-6). Verses 4 through 6 are in parallel.

v. 4	Varieties of gifts	same Spirit
v. 5	Varieties of service	same Lord
v. 6	Varieties of activities	same God

“The triune God empowers them all in everyone.” All spiritual gifts have as their source the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God.

“The word ‘varieties’ implies division, distribution, allotment, or apportionment. It suggests that all believers receive at least one gift and that no believer receives all of the gifts.” (Robert G. Gromacki, Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians [Baker, 1977], 151)

Listen to this beautiful statement by N.T. scholar Robert Gromacki.

“Since there is no competition among the person of the divine Oneness in the giving of the gifts, there should be no jealousy between gifted believers in the one body of Christ. **Complementary harmony of purpose and cooperation should prevail. Unity and diversity are not rivals, but partners in God’s redemptive program.**” (Robert G. Gromacki, Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians [Baker, 1977], 151, 52)

Let us stop for a moment and consider the three categories that are noted in verses 4-6.

1. A variety of gifts (v. 4)

The word “gift” is *charisma* and comes from the family of words that has *charis* as its parent. It means “grace.” “In classic usage the word *charisma* speaks of **a gracious gift only from God to men.**” (NIDNTT, Vol. 2, Editor Colin Brown, 115) Paul uses it to speak of a gift in contrast to a wage in Romans 6:23. “With the exception of one text in 1 Peter [4:10], *charisma* is an exclusively Pauline concept (16 times).” (NIDNTT, Vol. 2, Editor Colin Brown, 118) Paul will use the word in 12:4, 9, 28, 30, and 31. From its occurrence 5 ideas are expressed.

- Paul speaks of imparting spiritual gifts to his audience in Romans 1:11, 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6. I believe this is an apostolic responsibility.

Rom. 1:11 For I long to see you, that **I may impart unto you some spiritual gift**, to the end ye may be established;

1 Tim. 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, **which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.**

2 Tim. 1:6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, **which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.**

- The gifting of God is without repentance (Rom. 11:29).
- Spiritual gifting differs from individual to individual (Rom. 12:6).

Rom. 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

- Marriage and/or celibacy are both looked upon as gifts from God (1 Cor. 7:7).

- Our spiritual gifting should not be neglected (1 Tim. 4:14).

1 Tim. 4:14 **Neglect not the gift that is in thee**, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

In light of this notice how John MacArthur summarizes this idea.

“Spiritual gifts are special capacities bestowed on believers to equip them to minister supernaturally to others.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians [Moody, 1984], 290).

2. A variety of ministries (v. 5)

The word *service* is inside the family of words for deacon. It means to serve or minister. There are a variety of ministries expressed in and through the local church.

3. A variety of activities/works (v. 6)

The word used is our English word *energy*. This exact word is only used in verses 6 and 10 (“miracles”).

There might be a slight variation in each of the three statements, but I see the emphasis being more on their similarity rather than their differences. Thus all gifts are ministries and works and all ministries are works and gifts. Paul uses three different words to describe different aspects of the same thing; just as He refers to the Holy Spirit, the Lord and God the Father as the same. It is their equality that He is emphasizes and not their economy.

Heavy emphasis is placed on the idea of variety.

“Essential to unity is diversity. Unity of spirit and purpose can be maintained only through diversity of ministry. But unity is not uniformity.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians [Moody, 1984], 290).

ILLUSTRATION:

Remember when you were a kid playing playground football or baseball? Remember when everyone wanted to be the quarterback or the next guy to bat? Ultimately only one guy is going to play quarterback and only one guy can be at the plate to bat the ball. Paul will stress this idea shortly, but it stands to be repeated. Diversity is essential to unity; each part knowing what it is to do and doing it.

All of the various expressions of grace-gifting come from a common source. Thus they are always complementary and never contentious.

“The sum is this – that there is nothing in mankind that is good or praiseworthy but what comes from God alone.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 20, 1 & 2 Corinthians [Baker, 1984], 400).

The second point Paul makes speaks of their common purpose.

B. Grace gifting for body unity has a common purpose (v. 7)

There is a diversity of capacity (v. 4), opportunity (v. 5), and equipping (v. 6), but there is only one purpose and it is for the common good of the local assembly. Everyone has a spiritual gift and it is for the common good (v. 7). Verses 8 through 10 explain the diversity in the giving and receiving of gifts.

When the Holy Spirit is manifested the body of Christ benefits. Why, because the Holy Spirit is working in and through the body of Christ the very presence of Christ.

There is no such thing as a “gift-less” believer. Every believer has been given a gift to be exercised for the common good of the body of Christ. The expression of the gift is first in the Local Church and then through the Local Church to those around the Local Church both locally, nationally, and globally. God has given every Local Church all the necessary gifts to proclaim Christ to its community.

Within verse 7 there are three ideas. We have touched on these ideas but it is necessary to revisit the thought as found in verse 7. We should also read 1 Pet. 4:10, 11.

1 Pet. 4:10 **As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; **so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen.

The first idea is found in the words “each one.”

1. Every believer has a grace-gift (“each one”)

As already noted there is no such thing as a gift-less believer. Every single believer has a grace-gift from God.

“For Paul *charis* is the essence of God’s decisive saving act in Jesus Christ, which took place in his sacrificial death, and also of all its consequences in the present and future (Rom. 3:24ff). **It is inconceivable to Paul that there should be any Christian without some gift of grace.** At the same time, a single individual may be characterized by more than one gift of grace.” (NIDNTT, Vol. 2, Editor Colin Brown, 119, 121)

Listen carefully to the following statement by John MacArthur.

“Each believer becomes as unique spiritually as his fingerprints are physically.”
(John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians [Moody, 1984], 291).

Isn't this incredible? Each one of us is uniquely placed in His body for the benefit of the other members. You are needed to this fellowship and you are His grace-gift to those around you.

APPLICATION:

- Intellect – You might not know what your gift is, but this should not keep you from serving. There are necessary limits to what you can do outside and inside your gifting, but everyone should be serving. Christians are built for contact within believing communities.
- Volition – You need to choose to be involved at whatever level you can be.
- Emotion – Your choice for service will bring you a satisfaction that will not otherwise be experienced.

The second idea is found in the statement “manifestation of the Spirit.”

2. Grace-gifts manifest/reveal God (“manifestation of the Spirit”)

The purpose of your gifting is not so that you can be seen or boast but rather that He is seen and that He is made much of. If your gifting draws attention to you, then an adjustment must be made. John said, “He must increase and I must decrease” (John 3:30). This is equally true concerning the manifestation of the Spirit through you.

“The manifold outworking of the one grace in individual Christians through the one Spirit is called by Paul charisma, a personal endowment with grace.”
(NIDNTT, Vol. 2, Editor Colin Brown, 121)

Every time we serve we are manifesting the Spirit.

“Verse 7 says that the gifts and ministries of believers in the church are manifestations of the Spirit. They are meant to show the Spirit. They are meant to make the Spirit visible. They are meant to make us admire and love and submit to the Spirit.

This verse is [also] saying . . . that the work of the church is a thoroughly supernatural work. One of the greatest curses on a church is when its business is down to such a science that it manifestly runs by human effort alone. If that's the main thing in a church, the efficiency of man is glorified, not the sovereignty of the Spirit and the Lordship of Jesus.” (“Living in the Spirit and in the Body for the Common Good,” November 29, 1992. 1 Corinthians 12:1-13.
<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/92/112992.html>)

As a Christ-Exalting ministry we are not negating the deity of the Holy Spirit. In fact as God He is to be worshipped and glorified. His ministry however is to point us to the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit is honored when we glorify the Son. Every single believer has a grace-gift from God that reveals God.

APPLICATION:

- Intellect – Is this not an incredible thought? The Holy Spirit is working in every believer right now. Do you believe this?
- Volition – I am choosing to believe that the Holy Spirit is working in me and through me the very spirit of Christ to those around me.
- Emotion – My joy in ministry comes when God is proclaimed through the ministry.

The third idea is in “common good.”

3. Grace-gifts are for the common good of the **local assembly** (“common good” {1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:28; 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 26, 28, 33, 35; Eph. 4:12; 1 Pet. 4:10})

In classic usage “words formed from the Gk. root *char* indicate things which **produce well-being.**” (NIDNTT, Vol. 2, Editor Colin Brown, 115)

John Piper notes how,

“A result of the manifestation of God the Spirit in the life of the church—good comes to people. It is good for people to see God. It is good for us to see the manifestations of God's Spirit in each other's lives.” (“Living in the Spirit and in the Body for the Common Good,” November 29, 1992. 1 Corinthians 12:1-13. <http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/92/112992.html>)

The glory of God, the good of others, and a godly example as seen in 10:31-11:1 is clearly reiterated here. God's gifting is for His glory and when God's glory is manifested through the working of the Holy Spirit in and through His people, His people are the beneficiaries of His lavish displays.

When the gifts are expressed body unity is the result.

“True spiritual gifts are given by God to strengthen and manifest oneness, harmony, and power. Satan's counterfeit gifts are meant to divide, disrupt, and weaken. God's gifts build up; Satan's counterfeits tear down.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians [Moody, 1984], 278).

Every single believer has a grace-gift from God that reveals God for the common good of the body of Christ.

APPLICATION:

- Intellect – Your gifting benefits everyone around you. In the absence of it the body is hurt.
- Volition – Not to exercise your gift is a selfish act that wounds the local church and indirectly but ultimately the body of Christ at large.
- Emotion – There are few joys that surpass the “feeling” of serving others.

Each individual within His church has been given a specific spiritual gift. He gave the gift to be used within His body for the common good. From this, we can make the following observations.

1. Unity is not based on conformity. Diversity can and should flourish in the midst of intense unity.
2. There should be a deep appreciation for the gifts in other members within the body.
3. Spiritual gifts are for the common good. Each person is special and has been uniquely crafted by God for placement and significance within His body.
4. Spiritual gifts are not to be for the inflation of individual egos, but for the edification of His body.
5. God is the one who gives each of His people their giftedness. Each member is a grace gift to His church.

The Gospel presented

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

Throughout this study I place great stress on the local assembly. I do this for three reasons.

First, the book of Acts lays great stress on the local assembly.

Second, all of Paul’s letters are to local churches and/or to those who are leaders of churches with the exception of Philemon.

Third, the offices gifted to the body of Christ of “evangelists/church planters” and “pastors/teachers” are to local churches. Elders have no function in the absence of the local church context.

This emphasis does not negate the church universal, but the church universal is a non-corporate body. The church universal has never been gathered and will not be gathered until the second coming of Jesus Christ. This idea of spiritual gifting exercised in the context of the local church is brought out in the following statement.

“A spiritual gift is to be exercised within the ministry and outreach of the local church. Since the only legitimate, visible, organized expression of the Body church is in local churches, the function and exercise of the spiritual gifts is in that sphere.” (McCune, *ST, II*, p. 144).

Thus as it relates to the grace-gifts, God’s gifting is to be primarily used in the context of local churches. This does not exclude their expression outside of the local church, but their primary function is for the building up of the local church.

Often local churches *unintentionally* use non-local church ministries as an excuse to neglect their responsibilities. Listen carefully.

- Our responsibility toward unwed mothers is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward children is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward teenagers is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward the family is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward missions is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward education and training is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward the elderly is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?
- Our responsibility toward the hurting is not met by outside agencies. What are we doing to meet that need?

It is neither practical nor possible for us to be all things to all men collectively. But individually within the body we can carry out the purpose of God in and through His Church.

Why do we neglect these areas? Perhaps it is because those with the grace-gift have not had the platform inside of the local church to exercise their gifting.

Why do we neglect these areas? Perhaps it is because the demand placed on the local church would be too great.

- If the local church is living by sight instead of by faith, then the ministry will suffer.
- If the local church is living in the flesh instead of in the Spirit, then the ministry will suffer.
- If the local church is living like a master instead of like a servant, then the ministry will suffer.

- If the local church is living for the temporal instead of the eternal, then the ministry will suffer.

When we think that our gifting cannot be exercised in the context of a local church ministry, then we have a wrong view of our gifting and of the local church. I challenge you to think about what your grace-gifting is and how it can be used for the common good of this local church. If you submit yourself to God's leading in this area I believe you will be surprised as to how far reaching that ministry will have.

God will always override our ignorance and unwillingness to serve, but His pattern is for His people to serve in the context of local church ministry.

“The church cannot function, and it certainly cannot mature, without properly and faithfully using the gifts God gives His people for ministry.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians [Moody, 1984], 282).

APPLICATION (Where do we go from here?)

Questions to Ask the Text?

1. What would you begin writing [teaching] if you knew you would die soon?
2. What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?

God is working through the dying His gifting and what they are experiencing is for the benefit of the body. They are not alone in the dying process.

3. What do I see as the dangerous conformities (inside and outside the church) that lead us away from new life?

We would be sinning if we chose not to exercise our gifting in the context of a local church because we were too busy. Our “busy-ness” is not necessarily His business.

4. What easy or common patterns seduce our attention and distract our appetites?
5. As a preacher, am I falling prey to the expectations of the church rather than living in freedom and boldness before God?
6. Am I taming Scripture or letting it tame us?
7. Do I dare name my or their beloved idols, and with wisdom, lead others and myself in other directions?

Gift-giving is not for showmanship. I must always negate myself and elevate the God of the gift.

8. Am I holding up the gospel that calls us beyond the idols of self-interest to a life of joyful sacrifice?
9. In the reading of Scripture, one might consider including an Old Testament or a New Testament reading, the former selection related to the latter as promise to its fulfillment.
10. You might ask yourself, what's the stage of redemptive history at which we find ourselves in this passage?
11. You might ask yourself, how do I find myself in Christ (and therefore with His church) in this story?

I want Christ seen in this fellowship. This will happen only as we give ourselves to serving one another.

12. Read and hear the Bible with the church. Creeds, confessions, and a good systematic theology can all help us to see the limitations of our own narrow range of ideas, presuppositions, experiences, and longings.
13. Why am I preaching this?

In the absence of this truth, the overall well-being of the body is hurt.

14. What is the biblical idea?

“To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

15. How have I applied (or can I apply) this passage to my life?

I need to serve in the local church for the manifestation of the Spirit resulting in the good of the believing family.

16. How would a man, woman, married, single, youth, senior, seeker, etc., apply it?

Serve those around you.

17. Is it relevant Monday through Saturday, not just Sunday?
18. Can I give them a “take-home” application – something they can do at home, work or at school?
19. How can I show them how to do it?

In what way are you serving your fellow believers? This can be something as simple as a phone call, card, roofing projects, moving someone, providing a listening ear, praying with someone after the morning service and the list is endless.

20. Have I kept Christ in the application?

Christ is the application.

How to have a week of 7 Sundays – Reminders to keep it real

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

The Gospel presented

For the truth of Scripture to change your life through renewing your mind you must be in a right relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. This relationship is impossible apart from the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship is built around four key ideas. They can be summed up in four words: God, man, Christ, and response.

GOD

There is a real and personal God who is both Creator and Judge before whom you will stand and give an account as both creature and criminal.

MAN – RECOGNIZE

You have rebelled against God. We've all participated in this sinful rebellion. As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we do not accept the work of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

CHRIST – REALIZE

But God sent Jesus *Christ*, fully God and fully man, to die the death that we deserved for our sins – the righteous for the unrighteous – so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us.

RESPONSE – RECEIVE

The only saving *response* to this Good News is to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Acts 16:30, 31).

Have you turned to Jesus Christ as your only hope of eternal life? Today this can happen to you.